Abstract

Shembe, Ancestors, or Christ?
A Missiological Inquiry into the Status and Role of Jesus Christ in the amaNazaretha Church, Kwa Zulu, Natal, South Africa.

Early missionary endeavors have certainly contributed to the spreading of the gospel across the continent of Africa to the point that today the center of gravity for the Christian movement has shifted southward and Africa is becoming the most Christian continent in the world. Nevertheless, the missionary enterprise was never intended to be merely a head count of persons joining a Christian church. At the heart of the Christian gospel is the incarnated Christ, whose words and works penetrate cultures across the world drawing men and women to himself. In the words of Paul, "God was [and is] in Christ reconciling the world to himself." In living out their Christianity through the idiom of their own language and culture, the African Initiated Churches (AICs) claim to be such an expression of Christianity on the continent of Africa.

Isaiah Shembe (1867-1935), who received his catechetical instruction in a Wesleyan church and later joined the African Baptist Church, became an itinerant preacher in South Africa in the early 1900s. Through his charismatic gifting of healing and exorcisms Shembe soon commanded a following. The amaNazaretha Church of Isaiah Shembe was formed in 1911. The church has grown tremendously to approximately 2 million members and has experienced three leadership changes since its founding in 1911. The current leader is Vimbeni Shembe, a grandson of the founder. From my study of the literature I discovered

that most scholars of the movement (such as Oosthuizen, Hexham, and Becken) concluded that even by the time of his death in 1935, Isaiah Shembe was already deified by his ardent followers.

The question pursued in this dissertation is whether Jesus Christ is still central in the lives of the amaNazaretha adherents after almost one hundred years of the church's existence. Hence the purpose of this study was to discover if the amaNazaretha Church today, is a Christward movement. A Christward movement is defined as one that affirms that "Jesus is Lord" where people acknowledge and receive the person and works of Christ on the basis of the past (his work of atonement), present (mediatorial role and intercession on our behalf), and future (his second coming in glory as our hope). Three sub-problems are researched in the dissertation: the role of Shembe, the role of ancestors, and the role of Jesus Christ as expressed in the life-world of the amaNazaretha adherents. If Shembe and ancestors still serve in mediatorial roles for the amaNazaretha members, then what role does Jesus Christ have in the lives of these people?

The study begins with an overview of African Traditional Religions and proceeds specifically to Zulu Traditional Religion as the amaNazaretha membership are predominately Zulu speakers. It is argued that traditional aspects of Zulu religion and culture are carried over into their new religious belief system. I then offer a brief study of an African Initiated Church, namely the Zion Christian Church in South Africa, as one expression of African indigenous Christianity and show how this church contrasts with the amaNazaretha Church. Research was

conducted over a period of thirteen months between January 2000 and January 2003, and included an interview with the current leader Vimbeni Shembe. The dissertation concludes with an evaluation of the amaNazaretha Church in the light of the status and role of Shembe, the ancestor, and Jesus Christ. The conclusion is that the amaNazaretha Church is not a Christward movement and that the role of Christ has been replaced by ancestors and Shembe. The study concludes with implications for missiology that emanate from this study and further areas for research are proposed.

Dissertation Approval Sheet

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requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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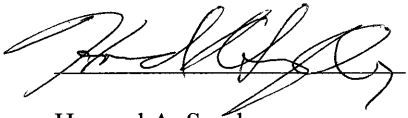

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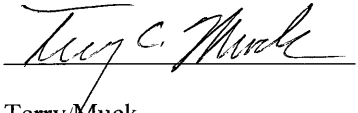

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A Dissertation

presented to the Faculty of the

E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism

Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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March, 2004

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is culmination of a seven-year journey. In retrospect, it was a journey fraught with many hurdles, yet each passing day resonated with new hope and a sense of accomplishment. In the face of my doubts, anxieties and fears, I thank God for his faithfulness. He providentially brought me into contact with significant people whose contributions to this project were indeed immeasurable.

In this regard, I have had the unique privilege of working with two gifted mentors. First, I offer my sincere thanks to Dr. Eunice Irwin, a constructive critic and friend, who taught me the art of critical thinking. Unfortunately her sabbatical prevented her from guiding my dissertation project through to completion. Second, I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Darrell Whiteman, who in the absence of Eunice Irwin, graciously offered to mentor me in the most critical phase of my writing, and also helped me through my dissertation defense. His selfless generosity and judicious observations helped me bring this project to a successful conclusion.

I wish also to thank the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Howard Snyder and Dr. Terry Muck for their helpful comments throughout this project, especially from their respective disciplines of theology and religious studies. My thanks also go to Dr. Dale Walker who read my manuscript. In the same breath I wish to thank the whole faculty and staff of the E. Stanley Jones

School of World Mission and Evangelism for nurturing an environment where integrity, spirituality, and a passion for kingdom work coalesce so beautifully.

I am also indebted to the staff of the B. L Fisher Library for accommodating my numerous requests for library items not available in our library, some of them not even in the United States. My thanks and appreciation go to Dr. William Faupel, Mrs. Dorothy James, and Mr. Jeff Hiatt.

I wish to record my sincere gratitude to my research assistant, Joseph Mhlongo, who assisted me with translations and also helped me navigate my way through the socio-cultural life-world of the amaNazaretha movement. Several members of the amaNazaretha Church helped me network with potential interviewees during my field research. My thanks go to Ministers Ngidi, Gcwenza, and Mpanza, and Evangelist Mpanza. Bishop Vimbeni Shembe graciously allowed me to conduct my research at the church's center, Ebuhleni, and also granted me an interview. Professor Pippin Oosthuizen, a leading authority in South Africa on the AICs, encouraged me and offered me invaluable leads during the research in South Africa.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge my debt of gratitude to my family. To my wife Flora who assumed the dual role of homemaker and breadwinner, and who supported me with understanding and encouragement, I offer my thanks. To my daughters, Deborah and Eleanor, granddaughter, Kjeersten and son-in-law Jason, who graciously and with understanding accommodated my long and frequent absences from home and family functions, I offer my sincere thanks.

Plate 2: The author's first official visit to Ebuhleni in July 2000.
Picture taken outside Bishop Vimbeni Shembe's cottage.

Chapter 1

Shembe, Ancestors, or Christ: Foundations for the Exploration into the amaNazaretha Church

In my childhood days, I recall observing a woman's group of the African Zion Church conducting their worship services in the dining room of our rented cottage in Durban, South Africa. I looked forward to Wednesday afternoons when this group of women, some thirty in number, would gather for their weekly meeting. Keen in my memory are the beating of the drums, women singing beautifully in heavenly harmony, exorcisms and healing practices, and the intense yet passionate worship to their God, *Unkulunkulu.* All this fascinated me, yet the meetings struck me as "odd," and quite different from our "Christian" way of worship. The manner in which they invoked the Spirit, *Umoya,* seemed rather bizarre. At the tender age of seven or eight, I thought that perhaps, if they attended *our* church they might learn to have church the "correct way," and the "correct" way was *our way*.

My interest in and appreciation of African Christianity, though submerged in the intervening years, was to surface via my academic studies at the University of South Africa (UNISA) in an undergraduate course on the *African Independent Churches*, taught by Inus Daneel, author of *Quest for Belonging* (1987). Reflections on the African Independent Churches (AICs) prior to my studies at

UNISA had been done in a vacuum. However, following my initial exposure to African worship, my studies at UNISA, further reading in my graduate and doctoral programs, and my work among Africans in South Africa and neighboring countries, I have become acutely aware of the diversity and varied expressions of the Christian faith, especially among the AICs. Another experience occurred when I was serving as an executive member of the Sunday School Board for my denomination. This position afforded me the opportunity to visit Africans in many remote parts of the country. On one occasion I was invited to preach at a college Sunday evening service. When I offered the students the opportunity to make a commitment to Christ, all sixty-nine of those present came forward. The concept of "group conversion" became a reality for me for the first time. These contextual "oddities" and other unique cultural expressions of the Christian faith have not been discerned clearly by people outside of the African Independent Churches, and there has been a rush to judgment on African beliefs and practices.

In the era of apartheid, research on the AICs done by missionaries and anthropologists was not intended for reconciliation among the churches. Rather, the research focused more on the causes for dissension and secession, and it often emphasized syncretistic practices in the fledgling indigenous churches.[1] Today, with the advent of democracy and the lifting of apartheid, researchers may now study, live, and work among Africans without government restrictions. In this era of a new democratic South Africa, a researcher has the opportunity to become better acquainted with the AICs and gain an insider's perspective on their culture

and religious beliefs. With segregation abolished, people are more open to each other, irrespective of their racial, cultural, and linguistic identities.

My interest in African spirituality and my study of the AICs places me in a strategic position to bridge the gap between the AICs and the churches within the evangelical tradition, which are ill-informed about the beliefs and practices of the AICs. For example, my own denomination, the Full Gospel Church of God in Southern Africa, like other evangelical churches, believes that adherents of the AICs are still outside the Christian faith and thus in need of salvation.

Although this belief is not explicitly stated, one of the reasons for such a posture is the perception that the AIC members worship ancestors. For example, on my recent visit to South Africa, a senior official of our church inquired about my dissertation interest. When he learned that I was researching the amaNazaretha Church, his reaction in the form of a question was, "These people worship ancestors and are not Christian, are they?" These perceptions, whether implied or stated, have distanced if not polarized the African Independent Churches in South Africa from other White, Indian and Coloured denominations,[2] and also from other African mission and historic churches.

Although many evangelical Christians live in close proximity to members of the amaNazaretha Church, both by design (government restrictions) and misperceptions regarding their religious beliefs, Christians have been separated and polarized for too long. Thus, my study of the amaNazaretha Church offers an informed and sympathetic understanding of the movement and thereby encourages

conservative evangelical Christians to study these churches as expressions of fellow sojourners enroute to the eschatological kingdom of God. At the same time, where my research uncovered practices and rituals that are different and appear to be contrary to orthodox Christianity, I believe I still have the opportunity to initiate dialogue and discussion between the AICs and other churches, hopefully leading to a greater understanding of what form Christian discipleship could take among them.

The amaNazaretha Church

Isaiah Shembe (1867-1935) founded the amaNazaretha Church in 1911 when he claimed to have received visions to "preach, heal, and drive out demons" (Oosthuizen 1968b:35). According to his son Johannes Galilee Shembe (J. G.), Isaiah first joined a Wesleyan Church where he received catechetical instruction. When denied baptism by immersion in the Wesleyan Church, Isaiah found his home in a Baptist Church where he was welcomed. Shembe strictly followed the Old Testament Jewish laws and rituals, such as removing shoes during worship, leaving hair uncut, and avoiding certain foods. The Baptist pastor William Leshega could not identify with Shembe's strict adherence of Old Testament Jewish rituals. Thus, after working with Leshega for approximately three years Shembe seceded from the Baptist Church and began an itinerant ministry (Becken 1965:102). He saw parallels between the Jewish Nazarite sect[3] and the African people—both were dispossessed of their land, enduring foreign (White) domination, so he launched on the quest for (African) emancipation.

Upon Isaiah Shembe's death in 1935, his son J. G. Shembe assumed leadership. Upon the death of J. G. Shembe in 1975, however, a leadership struggle ensued, leading to secessions and minor skirmishes (Hexham and Oosthuizen 2001: xii). J. G. Shembe's son Londa Shembe claimed the right of leadership on the basis of ancestral succession and through "a charismatic calling" (2001:xii). As a result of the leadership dispute, Londa Shembe usurped control of the village Ekuphakameni with a small number of the members. Unknown assailants, however, murdered him in 1989 (Hexham and Oosthuizen 2001:xvi).[4] The majority of the members with their elected leader Amos Shembe, the younger son of Isaiah Shembe, relocated to a new center, Ebuhleni. After the death of Amos Shembe in 1996, his son Vimbeni Shembe was elected leader and continues to function in that capacity today, leading a group of approximately two million adherents.[5] The group that followed with Londa Shembe continues, and today numbers some one thousand members. Below (figure: 1) is a sketch showing the leaders of the church as part of the Shembe family.

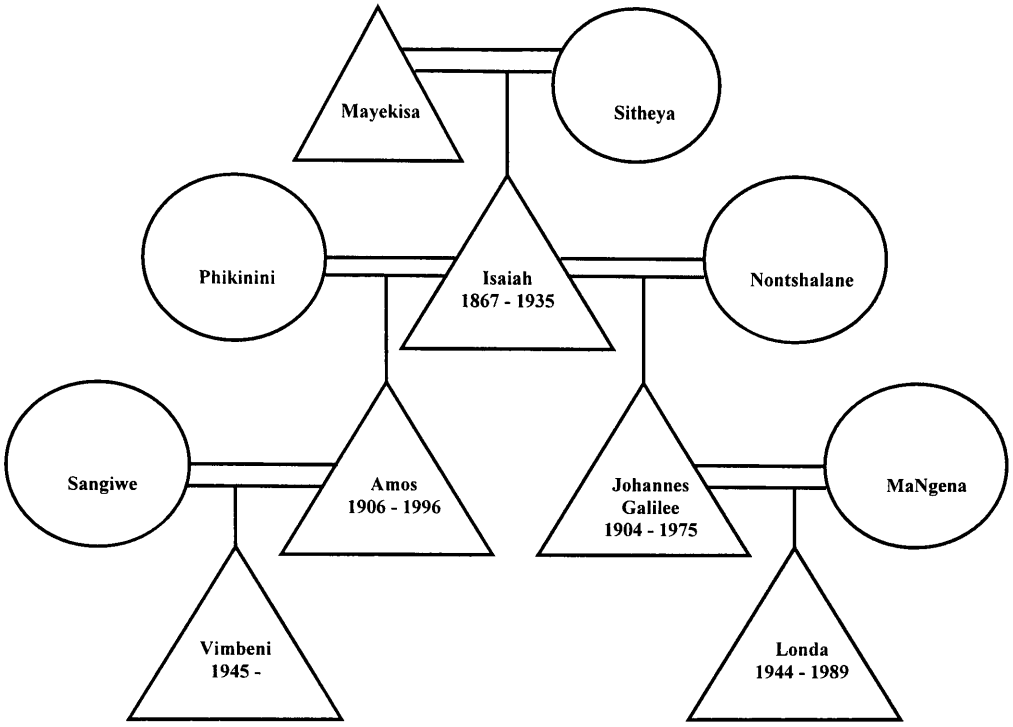

Figure 1. Shembe Family Tree

Oosthuizen claims that Isaiah Shembe endeavored to bring together two religions: Zulu traditions and customs and the Nazarite Old Testament tradition. Oosthuizen treated the coalescence of these two systems with some reservation (1968b:36). He came to the conclusion that the movement is post-Christian, and Isaiah Shembe had become a Zulu messiah, adding, "The movement of Shembe—the outcome of the meeting of two cultures and two religions—has developed doctrinally into a syncretistic post-Christian movement..." (Oosthuizen 1968b:36).

The Zulu socio-religious system with its demands "for a living mediator acting on the inspiration of the spirits of the chiefs and royal ancestors" (1968b:36) brings to the forefront the question of the status and role[6] that the amaNazaretha Church accords to Jesus Christ.

Charles Nyamiti's work *Christ as our Ancestor* (1984) brought me to a stark realization that ancestors are an integral part of the religio-cultural ethos of Africans. Nyamiti does not debate the fact of the status and role of ancestors in the African worldview; instead, he endeavors to show how the person and work of Christ may be incorporated into the African worldview without denying the African belief in ancestors. For Nyamiti, Christ becomes the ultimate or highest in the hierarchy of ancestors.

Scholars such as Cece Kolie (1997) of Guinea Africa and G.C. Oosthuizen (1989b) emphasize that Africans attribute any illness to a disturbance of the balance between people and spiritual forces. Thus the aim of healing is to restore the equilibrium (Buhrmann 1989:30). If ancestors (the spirits of the departed) were indeed mediators of healing, the Christological question would be, "What role does Christ play in mediating healing in the African hierarchy of divinities?" To answer that question, among others, it became expedient that I first study African Traditional Religions (ATRs)[7] to understand the historical development of the ancestor cult, especially with regards to mediation in prayer and healing. Second, it was necessary to discern any shift that takes place in the worldview of Africans who are converting from ATRs to AICs and whether they move in any

way toward a christocentric position when they take on the Christian faith, and if so, what is the nature of their Christology. Since the majority of Shembe adherents belong to the Zulu nation, a brief survey of Zulu history, religion, and culture follows in Chapter 3.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to discover if the amaNazaretha Church is a Christward movement. A Christward movement is one that recognizes that "Jesus is Lord." The amaNazaretha Church could be considered a Christward movement *if* it affirms "Jesus is Lord" in the sense that adherents of the Christian faith acknowledge and receive the person and work of Christ on the basis of the past (his work of atonement), present (his mediatorial role and intercession on our behalf), and future (his second coming in glory as our hope).

In Jesus Christ we encounter the one unique mediator between God and humankind. This role is so because Jesus is both God and human in one incarnate person, and it is through him that reconciliation is effected. His mediatorial role is seen in his work of atonement (death and resurrection), healing, and intercession in prayers.

First, our confidence in the atoning work of Christ becomes a reality when we discover that Jesus Christ *is* the Son of God incarnate and one with the very Being of God. Thus forgiveness and reconciliation becomes possible for

humankind through the atonement: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Second, when we pray, Jesus acts on our behalf both as representative and in a substitutionary way. This action is possible because he is both the one who offers and the offering on our behalf. Thus, in all our praying, public and private, formal and informal, we come before God only through Jesus Christ, and it is he who stands in our place and prays on our behalf: "We don't know what we should pray for. But the Spirit himself prays for us. He prays with groans too deep for words" (Romans 8:26).

Third, Christ is central when we realize that healing, mediated through Jesus, is evident in both the Old and New Testaments. In Isaiah's prophecy the writer reminds us that "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). In Hebrews the writer speaks of Jesus' high priestly role thus: "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

In order to discover what kind of Christology is held in the amaNazaretha Church, this study considers to what extent ancestors, the leader, and Jesus Christ mediate between people and God. These things became clear through participant observation at healing and Sabbath services at the amaNazaretha Church.

I examined these questions primarily through field research and participant observation, with interviews in the context of the amaNazaretha Church of Isaiah Shembe as this movement continues today in Durban, South Africa. I studied the large group whose headquarters is at Ebuhleni. The group is led today by Vimbeni Shembe, the son of Amos Shembe and grandson of the founder Isaiah Shembe.

There were three areas that I researched in order to determine if the amaNazaretha Church is a Christward movement: the role of Shembe, the role of Ancestors, and the role of Jesus Christ. These three sub-problems are expressed in the following four questions:

1. In what way does Shembe mediate on behalf of the people?
2. What roles do ancestors play in the religio-cultural ethos of the amaNazaretha Church, and what status do they hold?
3. If ancestors and the leader, Vimbeni Shembe, function as mediators, what place does Jesus Christ and the Triune God occupy in their daily practices and beliefs?

What is the relationship between the founding leader Isaiah Shembe and the Triune God? How does the current leader, Vimbeni Shembe, relate to the Triune God?

Data and Data Collection

In order to ascertain the place of ancestors and the leader Vimbeni Shembe in the everyday life of the amaNazaretha Church, I raised issues

concerning their roles and how those roles affected the position and place of Jesus Christ. I selected two research contexts to study in order to answer the problem and sub-problems, the Sabbath liturgical services, and the healing ceremonies. I gathered data from participant observation, collected first-hand statements from leaders and members, listened to stories that members told, and conducted interviews using my interview schedule (See Appendix 1). My interview schedule differentiated between actual questions I asked interviewees (bold type) and what I needed to know to solve the problem (regular type). I interviewed 68 individuals for the project, more than my original goal of 50 persons.[8]

I attended Sabbath services where I recorded hymns, sermons, prayers, and testimonies, and conducted interviews with leaders and members present. The hymns, sermons, prayers, and testimonies reveal how ancestors and the leader are viewed by the members of the amaNazaretha Church, and, consequently, in what way Jesus Christ is acknowledged in their liturgical practices. I selected for my field research an urban congregation, a suburban congregation, and a rural congregation.

In addition, during July 2000, 2001, and 2002 I attended the Shembe annual celebrations at their headquarters in Ebuhleni where a more representative part of the amaNazaretha Church gathers yearly. Especially during this month of festival I attended the weekly Sabbath services and recorded the sermons, songs, prayers, and testimonies.

Research Methodology

I collected from members, leaders, and Vimbeni Shembe himself, the data that correspond to the problem and sub-problems through the use of my interview schedule (Appendix 1), and I analyzed the hymns, sermons, and testimonies which I heard and recorded. In addition, I also viewed video material relevant to the July celebrations made available to me by Professor Oosthuizen, the South African researcher who has researched and published more works on the AICs in South Africa than any other scholar over the last forty years. Finally, I brought together a reflection group from within the Shembe community to discuss my observations and findings, meeting with them after the Sabbath services to ask questions about the various parts of the service.

To collect the necessary data I employed four methods: library research, participant observation, and interviews, which were shaped further by dialogue with a reflection group.

In field-testing my interview schedule on a previous visit to the Shembe headquarters, I discovered that people did not answer my questions directly, but preferred to tell stories.[9] In the setting of my interviews I listened to their stories, and as the occasions arose, I provoked further clarification by telling selected Bible stories (Jesus healing the blind and raising Lazarus from the dead) that related to the subject under discussion. For example, regarding healing beliefs and practices, where one of the methods used in the amaNazaretha Church is applying Vaseline to the body (Vaseline that is first blessed by Vimbeni Shembe), I

recounted the story of how Jesus healed the blind man by mixing clay and spittle and anointing the blind man's eyes (John 9). This method of reciprocal story telling helped me elicit the data I needed to solve the research problems.

Library Research

I studied the literature pertinent to Shembe, ancestors, and Christ both in the United States (B. L. Fisher Library and Morrison Library, Wilmore KY; University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY; Pitts Theological Library at Emory University, Atlanta, GA; Squires Library, Cleveland, TN) and in South Africa (University of South Africa; Natal University; University of Durban, Westville). I have also received assistance from Professor G. C. Oosthuizen, who graciously gave me access to unpublished documents pertaining to interviews conducted by him and other scholars.

Participant Observation

I attended twelve Sabbath worship services as participant observer during the months of June, July, and August 2002 at various locations throughout Kwa Zulu Natal. These services last approximately two hours. From my previous attendance at these services, I discerned a pattern and formal order of the entire service. As a participant observer, I had the opportunity to use my interview schedule to dialogue with members on the proceedings of that day's service. My African research assistant, Joseph Mhlongo, a long-standing member of the movement and one who has personally assisted researchers such as Oosthuizen,

Becken, and others, assisted me in identifying interviewees at the conclusion of each service.

I discerned four distinct activities of the Sabbath worship service: (1) the commencement which includes a prayer, a song from the hymnal and a responsive reading from the liturgical worship book,[10] (2) a litany of songs from the hymnal and then the sermon, usually from the Old Testament; (3) the conclusion with a time of corporate prayer, (4) after which the members are offered the opportunity to go forward for special prayer where the individual makes an offering of money in exchange for prayer from the minister, preacher, evangelist, or other leader.[11] Each part of the service —prayer, songs, sermons, and healing ceremony— provided me with data I needed to solve the sub-problems and led me to conclude whether the amaNazaretha Church is a Christward movement or not. I read Spradley's work, *Participant Observation* (1980), and knew the different types of participation[12] one should use in ethnographic research and how one should record such experiences.

Also, I attended the July celebrations at the headquarters of the amaNazaretha Church. Here I had the opportunity of meeting and interacting with a broad spectrum of members as the July festival attracts members from all over South Africa and the surrounding countries. This setting offered me the opportunity to confirm and reinforce my findings collected through the use of my interview schedule and participant observation.

In addition to the worship services as previously described, the July festival attracts a variety of cultural events such as dances and weddings. For example, the Sunday dances are rich in tradition and culture and not without religious significance. Although these traditional activities are not part of my research design and interview schedule, I learned more about the religious and cultural practices which further informed my learning about the church's culture and worldview.

In both the Sabbath services and the July celebration-services, the amaNazaretha use their hymnal, liturgical reader, and the Bible to aid their worship. These materials serve as important sources for their theology. Members' use of these sources told me more about the amaNazarethas' beliefs regarding God, Christ, ancestors, and Shembe. The preaching—the texts, themes and narratives— was also recorded and analyzed as a source from which to glean the required data. Another source of information valuable for my research was a series of video recordings made by Professor Oosthuizen during various January and July celebrations of the church. I used these video tapes in advance of the field research. They helped prepare me for a more constructive approach to interviewing and guided me in my theological reflection on the rituals and practices of the movement.

Another activity to observe was the regular healing rituals in the amaNazaretha Church, which are conducted at the end of the worship services. At

the Shembe headquarters, Vimbeni Shembe as leader presides over the healing rituals while in the local congregations, the evangelist or preacher presides.

Interviews

I used my interview schedule with Vimbeni Shembe, the leadership, and the members of the amaNazaretha Church to collect the data I needed to solve the research problems.

Interview with Vimbeni Shembe. In my previous visit to the Shembe headquarters at Ebuhleni in July 2000, I had the opportunity to meet with the leader, Vimbeni Shembe. Although this meeting was brief and he acceded to my request to conduct my research, he would not answer any of my questions. He politely referred me to one his close aides. Eventually, I secured a more exclusive interview with Vimbeni Shembe the head of the amaNazaretha church in January 2003.[13]

Interviews with leadership. From June to the end of August 2002, I interviewed the leadership of the church--the ministers, evangelists, and preachers. I had anticipated that this group of interviewees would give me a better understanding of their preaching and theology, as this group forms the inner circle of the church and are closest to the leader Vimbeni Shembe. However, as my data below will indicate, the ministers, evangelists, and preachers are no more theologically informed than the members of the church.

Interviews with membership. During this time I also interviewed a cross-section of the membership based on the following criteria. I interviewed men and

women in different age categories, long-standing members, and newer members of the church. This broad sample gave my research a truly representative cross section of the movement as a whole, across gender, biological age, duration as members, and place in the hierarchy—both the leadership and members at the grassroots level. I took samples from both rural and urban dwellers to ascertain whether their beliefs and practices have changed at all with the exodus from the rural to the urban areas. Although I had planned to conduct 50 interviews, I eventually conducted more than 70, of which 68 were used for my project. The interviews that I discarded were from interviewees who were interrupted by other engagements and could not complete the interview.

Reflection Group

I gathered a reflection group from among the Shembe leadership and membership for the purpose of dialogue and discussion following my observations and findings from the services. The group met informally whenever I could bring them together. When possible, I did meet with the group after Sabbath services to ask questions I had about aspects of the sermon. I met with this group a total of six times.

Definition of Terms

In this dissertation the following terms apply:

Status and Role

In this study the terms "status" and "role" relate to the position and function that Shembe and ancestors have in the religious and cultural ethos of the amaNazaretha Church. I then juxtapose their meaning with the Christian belief, as understood from Scripture, as to the status and role of Jesus Christ and how his position and function are understood in the amaNazaretha Church. Linton describes status as polar positions of reciprocal behavior between individuals or groups of individuals (1936:113). Linton further explains that "A status, as distinct from the individual who may occupy it, is simply a collection of rights and duties" (1936:113). Role, on the other hand, is fulfilled when a person given a status or many statuses, puts into effect the rights and duties accorded to such status or statuses (1936:114).

Ancestor Worship and Veneration

I do not dwell much on the discussion of whether Africans worship and venerate ancestors in this study for two reasons. First, from my own research of the literature on the subject and also my field research, I come to the conclusion that this point is moot and not a major point of dissension among Africans. Second, the debate on this question has been a Western one, or a non-African one, more than an African problem. However, African writers have addressed the issue only in response to non-African views on the subject as my research will show. Still, I offer a brief discussion of the terms below to show the complexity of imposing western categories on African religious and cultural practices.

Worship is universal, and all cultures of the world respond in veneration to a Supreme or transcendent Being. Veneration, on the other hand, is "The highest degree of respect and reverence; respect mingled with awe, excited by dignity, wisdom, or superiority, of a person" (Woolf 1973:1297). It is with this understanding that I find Idowu's discussion on the distinction between Deity, divinities, and ancestors helpful. He states,

> Deity and the divinities are distinctly, out-and out, of the super-sensible world, while the ancestors are of the living persons' kith and kin. The ancestors are related to the living community in a way that cannot be claimed for deity or the divinities who are definitely of a different order. (1973:184)

The above distinction sheds some light as to the manner and intent with which Africans approach ancestors. Although he does not define worship and veneration, on the question as to whether Africans worship ancestors Idowu adds,

> Worship and veneration...are psychologically closer than next door to each other: the emotional indicator is always trembling between the two, swinging to the one or the other in accordance with the emotional pressure or the spiritual climate of the moment. (1973:182)

Idowu's comments raise the question as to what traditional Africans are doing when they approach ancestors. An African spiritual Ifa priest, speaking of ancestor worship says, "... [it] is our connection to the past and our road map to a better future" (Philip John Neimark 1993:26). This comment by the African priest highlights the pivotal role ancestors hold in their respective societies. Maulana Karenga[14] claims that Africans do not worship ancestors but God only;

however, his description of honoring of ancestors closely resembles that of ancestor worship (1997:21). He adds,

> … [Africans'] profound respect for ancestors, which admittedly has a spiritual dimension, is best called veneration. The ancestors are venerated because they are a source and symbol of lineage; models of ethical life, service and social achievement; and they are spiritual intercessors between humans and the Creator. (1997:21)

The question of ancestor worship or veneration, or both, has received arguments for both positions in the literature without much consensus. In this dissertation I show that Zulus in the amaNazaretha Church claim that they talk (*tetha*) with their ancestors and not worship them.

Religio-cultural Ethos

I use the term "religio-cultural ethos" in this study to mean the coalescence of religion and culture in the life-world of the amaNazaretha Church adherents.

Zulu Terms[15]

Baba—the term used to address Shembe
Mfundisi—minister in the amaNazaretha Church
Mvangeli—an evangelist in the church who is lower in rank than a minister
Mshumayeli—a preacher who serves in a local temple and is lower in rank than the minister and evangelist
Mkhokheli—a women's leader in the church
Ifortini—the married women's group monthly meeting for all night prayer
Ebuhleni—the church's present epicenter meaning "a place of splendor"
Ekuphakameni—the church's original epicenter meaning "the elevated place"
Isangoma—a traditional healer
Isihlabelelo—the AmaNazaretha hymn

Theoretical Framework

The interpretation of data is always informed by theories relevant to the research problem and sub-problems. I will discuss the main theories I use initially under the main problem and then further under each of the sub-problems. These theories serve as interpretive grids for solving the research problem, namely, "Is the amaNazaretha Church a Christward movement?", and the sub-problems, under the three sub-sections: Ancestors, Shembe, and Christ. (See Table 1, Theoretical Framework below.)

Table 1. Theoretical Framework

Problem	Data needed & Methodology for Data Collection	Research Instrument	Theories
Is the amaNazaretha Church a Christward Movement?	A. Library Research	Literature on Shembe, ancestors, and Jesus Christ as mediator	1. Hiebert: Centered & Bounded Sets 2. H. Turner: New Religious Movements Typology 3. N. T. Wright: Caesar and Christ a. (Philippians 2:5-11) b. (Ephesians 1:20-21)
	B. Participant Observation	Spradley: "Doing Participant Observation"	
	C. Interviews	Stewart/Cash: "Interviewing Principles and Practices"	
Sub-problems:			
1. Role of Shembe	A.. Library Research	Literature on Shembe and succeeding generations of leaders	
	B. Participant Observation & Interviews generating Stories	1. Interview Schedule 2. Interview Questions for Shembe 3. Field Notes 4. Tape recordings	
	1. Sabbath Services		
	a. Sermons	Interview Schedule	1. Oosthuizen: "Isaiah Shembe and the Zulu World View" 2. Loubser: "The Oral Christ of Shembe: Believing in Jesus in Oral Societies"
	b. Hymns	Interview Schedule	3. Shembe Liturgical Song Book: Izihlabelelo Zamanazarehta. 4. Oosthuizen: *The Theology of an African Messiah: An Analysis of the Hymnal of "The Church of the Nazarites.*
	c. Prayers	Interview Schedule	5. Hexham: *Scriptures of the amaNazaretha of Ekuphakameni* 6. Shorter: *Prayer in the Religious Traditions of Africa*
	2. Healing Services		
	a. Actions of Shembe b. Testimonies of Members c Biblical story by researcher	Interview Schedule	1. Oosthuizen: "Isaiah Shembe and the Zulu World View" 2. Biblical: John 9:1-41 (Healing of the blind man)
	3. Funeral Services	Interview Schedule	1. Oosthuizen: *Theology of a South African Messiah* 2. Ephesians 1:20-2:6
	C. Interview with Shembe	1. Interview Schedule 2. Questions for Shembe	1. Oosthuizen: "Isaiah Shembe and the Zulu World View" 2. 1 Timothy:2-5 (Christ as Mediator)
2. Role of Ancestors	A. Library Research B. Participant observation & Interviews generating stories	Literature on ancestors in the Zulu tradition and in the amaNazaretha Church	1. Oosthuizen: "Isaiah Shembe and the Zulu World View" 2. Boot: "Religious Pluralism in a Zulu Chiefdom"
3. Role of Jesus Christ	A. Library Research B. Participant Observation & Interviews generating Stories	Literature on the views of Christ in the amaNazaretha Church	1. Nyamiti: *Christ as our Ancestor* 2. Biblical: Philippians 2:5-11 (Jesus is Lord)

Theories to Solve the Main Problem

I have used three theories to interpret the research problem, "Is the amaNazaretha Church a Christward movement?" First, from a behavioral science perspective, I use Hiebert's "Bounded and Centered Sets" model to determine whether the amaNazaretha Church is a Christward movement or not (1994:107-136).

The two categories that I consider from Hiebert's model are the "Intrinsic Bounded Set" and the "Extrinsic Centered Set" (See Figure 2).

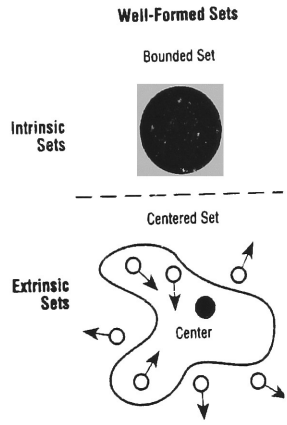

Figure 2. A Typology of Sets (after Hiebert 1994:112)

Intrinsic Bounded Sets, according to Hiebert, "are formed on the basis of the essential nature of the members themselves—on what they are in and of themselves.... They are all uniform in character" (1994:110). According to Hiebert's diagram, the only change occurs when one moves from outside to inside the category, or alternatively, from the inside to the outside (1994:109).

If Christianity is perceived as a bounded set, the boundary determines where the person is in terms of her or his Christian faith. The boundary separates a Christian from one who is *not* a Christian.

The Extrinsic Centered Set, however, is defined by its center and the relationship of people to that center. Hiebert's idea in this model is that in the case of people who may or may not be considered Christian the reference point is not the fixed boundary as in the Bounded Set, but movement toward the center or away from the center. In other words, "Distant members can move toward the center, and those near it can slide back while still headed toward it" (1994:124). However, there is still the boundary--whether one is making a conscious effort to move in a Christward direction. The conversion experience orients one in the direction of the set though one may not be close to the center.

When I use Hiebert's bounded set/ centered set theory to interpret the data and answer the research problem: "Is the amaNazaretha Church a Christward movement?," the main criterion for making that assessment will be to discern if Shembe members follow Christ and the Bible and whether they make Jesus Christ the center and Lord of their lives. According to Hiebert's diagram, the test will demonstrate whether the amaNazaretha Church is moving toward the center (Jesus Christ) or away from it.

The second theory is from a religious studies perspective. I use H. W. Turner's "Four-part Classification" of New Religious Movements (1981:49) to

help answer the research problem as indicated in Figure 3 below.

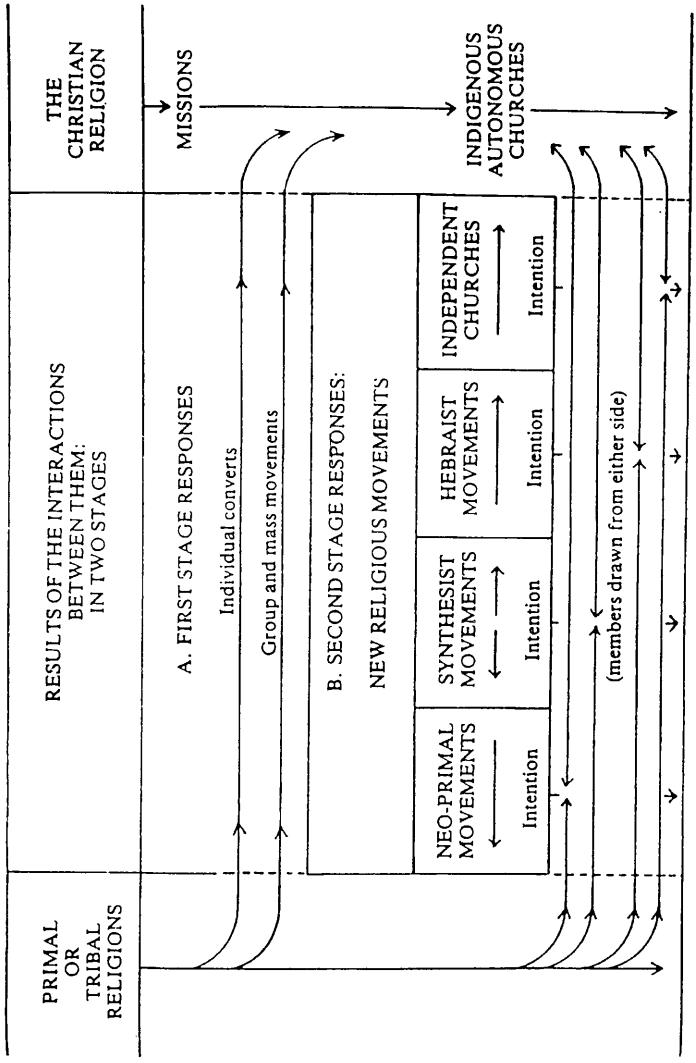

Figure 3. Four-part Classification of African Independent Churches (after Turner1981:49)

The terms these four categories represent are (a) Neo-primal, (b) Synthesist, (c) Hebraist, and (d) Independent Churches.[16]

Neo-primal movements are those that are near the primal religions but endeavor to rework and revitalize themselves with the influence of Christianity—some aspects of Christianity are borrowed, for example the belief in one supreme God. The next grouping, Synthesists, do not identify with either the traditional primal religion or Christianity. They do, however, borrow from both, and the result is a new religious movement that is distinct from either the old primal religion or the Christian tradition. Hebraists, on the other hand, make a conscious move away from traditional religions to the world of the Bible. They place their emphasis, however, on the Old Testament, and consequently do not fully embrace New Testament teachings on the person and work of Christ. Finally, there are Independent Churches that have converted from traditional religions and now follow the teachings of the Bible. According to Turner,

> [T]hey use the Scriptures, they make something central of Jesus Christ and especially of the Holy Spirit…They may be described as having been founded in Africa by Africans for Africans to worship God in African ways and to meet African needs as Africans feel them….(1989:10-11)

Turner's "Four-part Classification" together with Hiebert's "Bounded and Centered Sets" are helpful grids for me to evaluate whether the amaNazaretha Church is a Christward movement.

Even if the amaNazaretha Church is in some sense declaring Christ as the only way to God, what is the biblical and theological test for such a claim? Here

my research design moves beyond phenomenological analysis, and I seek out Christian criteria to help interpret the data and offer a solution to the research problem.

For a theological/biblical interpretation and solution to the main problem, I use two chapters in N. T. Wright's (1997) *What Saint Paul Really Said*, entitled, "Herald of the King" (39-62) and "Paul and Jesus" (63-76). I also use his article "Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire" (2002:1-13).[17] Wright offers an exposition of Philippians 2, where he juxtaposes the Greco-Roman slogan, "Caesar is Lord" with Paul's proclamation that "Jesus is Lord." Wright argues that in Philippians 2:5-11, Paul not only exalts Jesus Christ as the risen Lord; he implicitly contradicts the claim of the political and religious lord of that day, namely, Caesar. For Wright, Caesar's empire, the colonial outpost at Philippi, is the parody, and Jesus' empire, the church at Philippi, is the reality. According to Wright,

> Caesar demanded worship as well as secular obedience; not just taxes, but sacrifices. He was well on the way to becoming the supreme divinity in the Graeco-Roman world, maintaining his vast empire not simply by force…but by the development of a flourishing religion that seemed to be trumping most others either by absorption or by greater attraction. Caesar, by being a servant of the state, had provided justice and peace to the whole world. He was therefore to be hailed as Lord, and trusted as Savior. This is the world in which Paul announced that Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, was Savior and Lord. (2002:4)

The Philippians hymn, "every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11), that forms the centerpiece of Wright's interpretative scheme may help with some

observations I made during my previous visits to the amaNazaretha Church. For example, at the commencement of the Sabbath service, members kneel and bow as Vimbeni Shembe comes into the worship center. Further, the bumper stickers "Shembe is the Way" and "Shembe is the Black Messiah" are slogans used by the members of the church. These observations and designations will need to be interpreted from a theological and biblical standpoint as well, and N.T. Wright's work assists me in solving the research problem.

To interpret issues of mediatorial roles and power of Shembe and the ancestors, I use the enthronement passage in Ephesians 1:20-21, which speaks of Christ seated at the right hand of God, "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."

To get at the question of mediation, I consider the biblical passages that allude to Christ's role as mediator in salvation, healing, and prayers. The biblical passage that forms the basis for the Christian understanding that Jesus Christ is the sole mediator between humankind and God is 1 Timothy 2:5 ("There is one God and one mediator between men and God, the man Christ Jesus"). Regarding mediation in prayers, I consider passages in John's gospel (for example, John 14:13, 14; 16:23) where Jesus encourages his hearers to "ask anything of the Father in my name," and "he will give it to you."

Scholarly Analyses Related to the Sub-problems

The three sub-problems that I need to solve are the role of Shembe, the role of Ancestors, and the role of Jesus Christ in the amaNazaretha Church. Under each of the three sub-problems, I offer scholarly analyses for interpreting the observed phenomena: the Sabbath liturgical services and the healing services.

The Role of Shembe

According to Oosthuizen ("Isaiah Shembe and the Zulu World View" [1968a]), for the Zulu, God is not really known since he is all-powerful and so far away that people cannot approach him, or rarely do. Oosthuizen develops the theory that in the light of God's absence other forces take precedence. He comes to the conclusion that "Shembe has...usurped the position of God, who is still somewhat distant in the sense of being difficult to approach. He [Isaiah] is himself the very first among the gods and messiahs preached by missionaries" (1968a:7-9). From the data I collected through my participant observation and my interview schedule, I tested Oosthuizen's statement (Chapter 7) and discovered what members of the amaNazaretha Church believe about the leader Vimbeni Shembe. To achieve this goal, I participated in the following activities:

The Sabbath liturgical services. At the Sabbath liturgical services I collected data to interpret from sermons, hymns, and prayers.

Sermons. I heard and recorded several sermons preached by Vimbeni Shembe and also others to whom he delegated the preaching. To interpret the data collected I use Loubser's work, "The Oral Christ of Shembe:

Believing in Jesus in Oral and Literate Societies" (1993). J. A. Loubser[18] researched 23 sermons preached by Londa Shembe in the period from 1983 to 1986. These sermons, originally in Zulu, were recorded on audiocassette and transcribed and translated into English by research specialists at the institute for the study of New Religious Movements and Independent Churches (NERMIC) in Kwa Zulu Natal, South Africa. Loubser says that one of the keys to understanding Shembe's "unorthodox Christology may be found in the theory of orality" (1993:73). Here he appeals to the work of Walter Ong, stating, "Not only the speech conventions change when a society develops from an oral to a literate society, but the perception of reality itself is modified" (1993:73). One aspect of orality that Loubser discusses is contextualization. He adds,

> Because oral communication ...necessitates a direct contextual involvement of the speaker it requires that every narrative must be introduced uniquely into a unique situation...The oral mind is uninterested in definitions...The meaning of every word is thus controlled by the real-life situations in which the word is used here and now. (1993:74)[19]

Loubser thus comes to the conclusion that on the understanding of the theory of orality it becomes evident that

> ... the identification of Shembe becomes almost inevitable...It is unavoidable that a hermeneutic process arises in which the real events in the life of Shembe are constantly communicated in terms reminiscent of Jesus. The focus is never on Jesus or God, but on Shembe as exponent of divinity. (1993:74-5)

Loubser's theory of orality is helpful to me, first, for the interpretation of the data I collect from the sermons preached at the Sabbath services, bearing in mind that the amaNazaretha Church like the Zulu nation in South Africa is rapidly becoming

urbanized and literate. Second, most of the literature on the amaNazaretha Church pertains to the founder, Isaiah, and his sons Galilee and Amos Shembe; consequently, my study tests Loubser's theory of orality to discern how significant a shift is evident in the members' beliefs regarding the role of Vimbeni Shembe and the ancestors as compared to the role of Christ.

Songs. The amaNazaretha Church uses its own liturgical songbook for the Sabbath services (*Izihlabelelo ZamaNazaretha*, 1940). The book contains biblical passages and responsive readings along with hymns written by Isaiah Shembe and Galilee Shembe. To understand and translate the data I use Oosthuizen's *The Theology of an African Messiah: An Analysis of the Hymnal of "The Church of the Nazarites"* (1976). This work contains a complete translation and interpretation of all the hymns in the Shembe liturgical book. According to Oosthuizen the theology implied in the hymnal shaped the theology of the amaNazaretha Church (1976:ix). For example, Oosthuizen claims that Isaiah Shembe was not only mediator but Messiah to his followers (1976:4). He continues,

> The Messiah in the Izihlabelelo [hymns] is not Jesus Christ. Shembe is the mediator of the iBandla lamaNazaretha. In order to establish who the messianic figure actually is, one has to analyze the context in which certain concepts are being used. (1976:35)

In light of the fact that Jesus is only mentioned in a "few hymns," and that Shembe features prominently, Oosthuizen concludes that "he [Shembe] himself has

usurped the place of Jesus" (1976:36). I test Oosthuizen's theory against the interpretation of the hymns offered by the interviewees to solve this sub problem.

Prayers. On my previous visits to the amaNazaretha Church, I attended several Sabbath services. During the services members engaged in corporate prayer, and often I would hear people begin their prayers with the phrase *Nkulunkulu Ka Shembe*, meaning, "God of Shembe." When I asked why this was so, one member said, "We approach God only through Shembe; he gets us through to God." In my analysis of prayers at the amaNazaretha Church, I raise this issue with my interviewees and elicited their response as to who mediates their prayers. I then tested their interpretations by using Irving Hexham's edited work, *The Scriptures of the amaNazaretha of Ekuphakameni* (1994).[20] Londa Shembe, grandson of Isaiah Shembe, interpreted the prayers in this volume shortly before his tragic death in 1989. According to Londa Shembe, "Isaiah Shembe was the mouthpiece and instrument of Jehova, whom he reflected among the people, to lead the Zulu nation out of bondage" (1994:xxiv).

I am familiar with Heiler's classic work, *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion* (1932), especially his chapter on "Primitive Prayer" (1932:1-64). I concur with Shorter, however, that this work is both dated and does not assist us in understanding mediation in prayers in the African context. I am also aware of John Mbiti's essay on prayers, *The Prayers of African Religion* (1975b), in which the author records and analyzes some 300 prayers. His work, although valuable, does not address the question of mediation. Shorter's work,

Prayer in the Religious Traditions of Africa (1975), on the other hand, is more useful to my research. When observing prayers made by the members of the amaNazaretha Church, I got at the question of who mediates their prayers. Here Shorter offers a typology that I use as illustrated below:

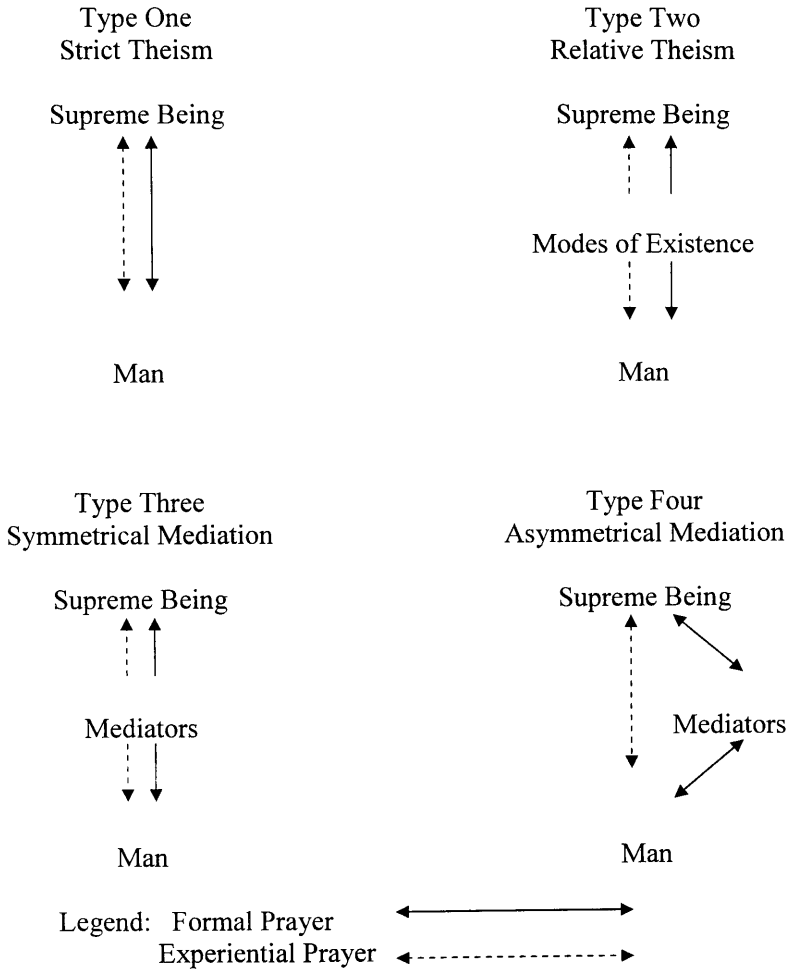

Figure 4: The Basis for a Typology of African Prayer: Formal and Experiential Prayer (after Shorter 1975:10-11)

The four types (1975:8-11) that he proposes are 1) Strict Theism: a supreme being is invoked directly and ancestral spirits play no significant role in mediation; 2) Relative Theism: the supreme being is called upon through a variety of spirits and heavenly bodies; 3) Symmetrical Mediation: here ancestral spirits are called upon to mediate prayers and worship and also mediate reciprocally on behalf of the supreme being; 4) Asymmetrical Mediation: mediators act mainly as channels of prayers and worship; however, the supreme being is still experienced directly by people.

Healing Ceremonies. As is the case with any other African group in South Africa, healing in the amaNazaretha Church cannot be viewed only through a Western rational approach. African healing is rooted in a worldview that is more integrated and holistic. Oosthuizen offers one model for interpreting healing in the amaNazaretha Church. I use his work, "Isaiah Shembe and the Zulu World View" (1968a), to interpret the data I collected in regard to healing. Oosthuizen quotes Galilee Shembe as saying, with regards to healing,

> The Zulus were once told of a God "who cannot see, who has neither love nor pity. But Isaiah Shembe showed you a God who walks on feet and heals with his hands, and who can be known by men, a God who loves and who has compassion." (1968a:7)

Oosthuizen theorizes that Isaiah Shembe (and consequently Galilee, Amos, and Vimbeni Shembe) follows in the tradition of the diviner (*isangoma*). Diviners are said to be mediums of supernatural power and are possessed by the spirits of ancestors. Their main function is to heal the sick, and the ancestors or the spirits of ancestors are the source of power to them. In Chapter 7, I test Oosthuizen's theory to

see to what extent Shembe mediates healing through the ancestors and what role Christ has in healing.

For a biblical theory or hermeneutic on healing, I use the story of Jesus' healing the blind man when he applied "spittle and clay" on the man's eyes and instructed him to wash in the pool of Siloam (John 9:1-41). John Marsh in his commentary, *Saint John* (1988:376-390), offers a theological rationale for Jesus' use of spittle and clay. He says,

> ...much more is involved in healing one infirmity than the restoration of one function to a person; rather does Jesus' healing constitute the re-creation of the whole person. This is symbolically represented in the Johannine narrative by the introduction of the clay that is mixed with spittle, reminding the alert reader of the fact that in Genesis God had first made Adam out of the dust of the ground, when it had been softened by rain and mist (Genesis 2:5-7). (1988:378)

I use this miracle to show that it has affinity with the methods of healing employed by the Shembe community. In interviews I discussed the method and means of healing to get at the question of ultimately who heals.

Interview with Shembe. In order to interpret the responses to the interview questions I received from Vimbeni Shembe, first, I use Oosthuizen's work, "Isaiah Shembe and the Zulu Worldview" (1968a). Second, from a biblical perspective as an interpretive grid to analyze the responses I received from Vimbeni Shembe, I use 1 Timothy 2:5: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." The theological assumption that Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and humankind is explicit in Scripture. The Greek word *mesites* (mediator) also appears in the book of Hebrews (8:6; 9:15; 12:24), referring to the role of Christ and

the different dimensions of his mediatorial work (Nash 1977:89). By way of example, we may look at Christ as mediator of our prayers. The Christian's prayer is mediated by Christ. We are encouraged by Christ himself to pray in his name (John 16:23-34). Praying in Jesus' name becomes possible because of his ministry as mediator from the heavenly realms. We are told in Hebrews 4:15 that Jesus, our mediator, is one who sympathizes with our weaknesses. These biblical citations all corroborate what Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:5, and thus they are helpful in interpreting the data I collected through my interview with Vimbeni Shembe.

The Role of Ancestors

Given the fact that ancestors have always played a role in the religio-cultural practices of Africans, my study seeks to discover to what extent ancestors are important to the amaNazaretha Church. Oosthuizen in his work "Isaiah Shembe and the Zulu World View" (1968a) claims that "...ancestor worship stands at the center of the Zulu tradition" (1968a:3) and perhaps also in the amaNazaretha Church. In an interview with a close aide to Amos Shembe, Francis Boot raised the question about the role of ancestors in the amaNazaretha Church. The aide, Rev. Alex Mpanza, said,

> To say that in Zulu society there are those who have completely forgotten about it [ancestors] would not be fair to your question. Most of my colleagues and ministers I have questioned won't preach about the ancestors and educate their congregations. About a minister who preaches critically about the ancestors it is said: azombulula amadlozi he will be killed by the ancestors [emphasis in the original]. (1991:132)

I observed the Sabbath and healing services to discover to what extent ancestors are still active in the religious life of the amaNazaretha Church.

To interpret the data I use the work, "Religious Pluralism in a Zulu Chiefdom" (1991) by anthropologist Francis H. Boot. Boot did extensive fieldwork among Zulu people in Natal, the home of the majority of Shembe members, where he investigated the role of ancestors in the everyday life of Zulus and particularly of members of the amaNazaretha Church. Boot's field research and his conclusions assist me in interpreting the data I collected regarding the role ancestors have in the life of the amaNazaretha Church.

My main source, however, for interpreting the data is Oosthuizen's work, "Isaiah Shembe and the Zulu World View" (1968a). He argues that in Isaiah Shembe's time no barrier existed between this present world and the next; the living and the dead constituted one community (1968a:4). The result was that when one became a Christian there was tension between the ancestor worldview and the new beliefs of the Christian faith. Oosthuizen's theory is that "Isaiah Shembe attempted to overcome this tension by making what is basic in the Zulu worldview the determining factor in religious living" (1968a:4). His conclusion is that Shembe's emphasis on the Zulu tradition with ancestor worship as central in his doctrine was attractive to his followers. Thus "Shembe's emphasis on the function of the ancestors was due to his concern for the well-being of the Zulu nation, which always depended on right relations with the ancestors" (1968a:4).

The Role of Jesus Christ

Here I use two interpretative grids to analyze the data I collected from my participation observation at Sabbath and healing services.

First, I had anticipated using Charles Nyamiti's work, *Christ as Our Ancestor* (1984) where he demonstrates that an African teaching on the ancestors is preparatory for the Christian teaching on Christ as the chief ancestor. In his work Nyamiti shows how cultural values may be purified or modified and introduced into Christianity:

> For what does the African desire from his ancestors if not their supernatural power and mediation in his favor, together with material and spiritual benefits, contact with God and his dead relatives? But where could these values be found in a higher or better form than in Christ the God-man? (1984:69)

Nyamiti's work is an attempt to develop an African Christology. The discussion moves on the lines that since Christ is the Father's Son, and we are the Father's children, Christ becomes our Brother-Ancestor;[21] it is he who will redeem us from death. Nyamiti goes on to claim that just as ancestors heal and serve as prophets, advisors, and priests, Christ serves in similar functions, except that he exceeds them all. Nyamiti dwells on the similarities between ancestors' functions and Christ's pastoral and redemptive function and thus draws his conclusions to demonstrate how superior Christ is to ancestors. While this work is helpful, I discovered that Nyamiti's work does not fit the profile of the amaNazaretha where their Christology does not appear to be consistent with orthodoxy. However, Nyamiti's work does provide a measure for one variety of orthodoxy.

Second, to better understand what Christ is doing for Africans in the African worldview, I use a post-resurrection text, Philippians 2:5-11 to interpret theologically his role in the amaNazaretha Church. I have already discussed this passage in my discussion of the main problem above.

Review of Literature

I discuss the literature relevant to my research problem under the following sub-headings: General Background to the amaNazaretha Church and Background to African Traditional Religions.

General Background to the amaNazaretha Church

Given the proliferation of the African Independent Church movement in Africa and particularly in South Africa, it is no surprise that since Bengt Sundkler's *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (1961),[22] publications and scholarly articles have appeared unabated and with monotonous regularity.[23] However, I have identified some foundational works by scholars both prior to and after Sundkler. These works include John Dube's *Ushembe* (1936), a biographical sketch of Isaiah Shembe the founder. This source is the earliest available in print in Zulu and was published shortly after the death of the founder in 1935.[24] Esther Roberts, an anthropological student, produced a biographical sketch including a first hand account of the death and burial of Isaiah Shembe for her Master's thesis, "Shembe: The Man and his Work" (1936). Almost ten years passed before Zulu scholar Absolom Vilakazi produced his unpublished Master's thesis, "Isonto LamaNazaretha: The Church of the Nazarites" (1954). It was not until 1986 that Vilikazi's revised version of his thesis was published under the title *Shembe: The Revitalization of African Society*. Then came the work of South African Afrikaans Reformed scholar G. C. Oosthuizen, who in 1967 published his *The Theology of a South African Messiah*. Oosthuizen attempted to elicit a theology

of Shembe from the hymns that Shembe had written. Albeit a controversial work, Oosthuizen came to the conclusion that Shembe "[had] usurped the place of Jesus" (1976:35). Then in 1976 Sundkler produced his second work, *Zulu Zion*, in which he retracted some of his criticisms of the amaNazaretha Church.[25] In the interim, David Barrett produced his *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (1968), in which he analyzed the causes of independence in some six thousand movements in Africa. Hans-Jurgen Becken, a Lutheran Scholar from Germany, in the late 1970s and early 1980s produced some significant writings out of his empirical research among the Shembes; for example, his work *Ekuphakameni Revisited* (1978) is an attempt at delineating the various stages of development and growth of the movement. Becken, in all of his works alludes to his judgment that the amaNazaretha Church is "Christian."[26] Other works of significance discussed in this review are those of Carroll Muller, Liz Gunner, Mike Kitshoff, and Oosthuizen, the most prolific writers to date on the movement.

Robert C. Mitchell and Harold W. Turner compiled *A Comprehensive Bibliography of Modern African Religious Movements* (1967) which was later edited by Harold Turner in *Bibliography of Modern Religious Movements*, Supplement I (1968) and Supplement II (1971). This source is important because it is linked to the corresponding microfiche texts in *Turner Collection on Religious Movements Vol. 2: Africa* and is one of seven volumes. Stan Nussbaum edited Turner's work with a new index in 1993. The work, which is divided into two main sections, namely, a section

on theory and a "general description" section, is important as there have been few significant works of this nature since this work was published.[27]

Hans-Jurgen Becken, in his work, "The Deeds of Shembe as Described by his Eyewitnesses" in *Afro-Christian Religion at the Grassroots in Southern Africa* (1991:151-163), recounts the life and times of the prophet Isaiah Shembe, a wandering ascetic, itinerating through the country preaching, teaching, and baptizing, until he finds a haven to rest from his labors. This place becomes his settlement with various ministries exercised for the wellbeing of the members and adherents. The location becomes the center for yearly pilgrimages and celebrations, attracting the membership from distant places.

In his article, "Ekuphakameni Revisited: Recent Developments within the Nazaretha Church in South Africa" (1978), Becken delineates the history of the amaNazaretha Church in three phases: The first period, from the establishment of the church in 1910 to the death of the founder prophet Isaiah Shembe in 1935, was shaped by his ascetic personality and may be called the *stage of formation;* the second period from the installation of the founder's fourth son Johannes Galilee Shembe in 1936 to his death in 1976 was molded by this able chief-type leader of the second generation and may be called the *stage of consolidation;* the third period in the history of an AIC can be described as the *stage of institutionalization* (1978:162-163).

An early work that sets the context for secession and independency is B. G. M. Sundkler's *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (1961). Sundkler traces historically the beginnings of the African Independent Churches, citing the earliest recorded

secessions in South Africa as occurring in 1884 (Tile) and 1892 by the Ethiopian church. He, however, records an even earlier attempt at emancipation from a mission church by the Basuto congregation named Hermon in 1872. In Sundkler's work one encounters for the first time an attempt at a typology of the churches among the African Independent Churches (1948:49ff). Here Sundkler differentiates between two main types of churches: Ethiopian and Zionist.

While Sundkler devotes little space and discussion to the amaNazaretha Church in this volume, his second work, *Zulu Zion and some Swazi Zionists*, (1976), gives the movement wide coverage beginning with the Prophet Isaiah's early life and the events that led to the formation of the amaNazaretha Church. In this work Sundkler calls attention to the writings of scholars such as Esther L. Roberts (1936), A. Vilakazi (1954), Katesa Schlosser (1958), G. C. Oosthuizen (1976), and H. J. Becken (1972). Sundkler's works are characterized as the first attempt at a serious and comprehensive study of the African Independent Churches.

In addition to terminologies, writers have developed typologies to study the phenomena prevalent within the various churches. Establishing a common framework or grid becomes imperative if only for the sole purpose of distinguishing the essential features of the individual movements. Here Harold Turner's work, *Religious Innovation In Africa: Collected Essays on New Religious Movements* (1979b), has become the standard and the point of departure for scholars attempting a working typology[28] for the African religious phenomena. Turner's four-part categorization[29] of Neo-Primal, Synthesist, Hebraist, and Independent Churches (1979b:9), is still used

by scholars today, for example, in Inus Daneel's *Quest for Belonging* (1987). This work points me to an essential feature in the amaNazaretha Church, namely that they are Sabbatarians, keeping rigorously the fourth commandment and are closely tied to the Old Testament. Thus, researchers like Oosthuizen would refer to them as Hebraist and therefore not "Christian."

Oosthuizen has demonstrated through field research that AIC prophets and leaders are most likely to be called to their office by *ancestors* through dreams and visions. In *The Healer-Prophet in Afro-Christian Churches* Oosthuizen (1992) cites the case of Isaiah Shembe and his calling by ancestors (1992:28).[30] While Oosthuizen does cite additional ways that prophets are called (dreams and visions, and the Holy Spirit), Daneel in *The Background and Rise of Southern Shona Independent Churches* (1971)[31] demonstrates that among the Shona in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), leaders received their call through dreams and primarily visions and possession by the Holy Spirit (1971:463). I use these sources as points of comparison in my study of Shembe and his understanding of ancestors and their role in Zulu religious life.

General Background to African Traditional Religions

To discover what Africans believe about God, Shembe, ancestors, and Christ in African Independent Churches, it was imperative that I first study African Traditional Religions.[32]

E. Bolaji Idowu, professor of religious studies and teacher of African Traditional Religions in Nigeria, in his book, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (1991[1973]), outlines the history of African Traditional Religion before he

goes on to describe its nature and structure. This study is helpful in that it treats systematically African belief in God, divinities, spirits, and ancestors (1991:135-203). Idowu's basic premise is that ancestors obtain blessings and favor from the Supreme Being and act as dispensers and mediators of such blessings and favor. My research questionnaire was designed to investigate this issue in the context of the amaNazaretha Church.

John Mbiti, in his work *Introduction to African Religion* (1975a), discusses the rituals and ceremonies of various African religions and was the first to coin the phrase *living-dead* to refer to ancestors. On the question of worship or veneration, he maintains that

> Although African peoples use...intermediaries [ancestors] in performing some of their acts of worship, they do not worship the intermediaries themselves as such. They simply use them as conveyor belts, as helpers or assistants. (1975a:64)

Mbiti's articulation of the role and status of ancestors in African Traditional Religions[33] is important for this study because it helps us to discern the shifts in beliefs and practices on ancestor mediation when people move from African Traditional Religions to Christianity.

John Pobee[34] in his work, *Toward An African Theology* (1979) reminds us that culture and religion are never static, and therefore he warns against "fossil culture" and "fossil religion" (1979:44). This work brings an acute awareness that one system of belief is not pervasive in Africa due to the diversity found there. Hence, one may speak only of "*an* African religion or *an* African worldview" (1979:44).

Consequently, Pobee can articulate the belief and practice of ancestors, only in his own context, namely, the Akan society of Ghana. Somewhat different from Mbiti, Pobee, in his work *Aspects of African Traditional Religion* (1976), says of ancestors,

> ...We come to the old problem of whether it is ancestor-veneration or ancestor-worship.... It is more than veneration.... Since ancestors have a more direct and immediate interest in the affairs of the clan in the here and now, they are for all practical purposes the real forces in life, especially when their judgments are immediately manifested in disasters. Thus for all practical purposes they are worshipped and are the second pillar of Akan religion. (1976:9)

I will refer to Pobee's works to show that ancestors are an integral part of African Traditional Religions, although acknowledged differently depending on the particular society.

Benezet Bujo, an African theologian and author of *African Theology in its Social Context* (1992), suggests in an article, "Toward an African Ecclesiology," (1995) that the ancestors of earlier generations transfer power to ancestors that follow. Thus a chain is formed assuring unity throughout the generations to the present in a given community (1995:3). Bujo does not say how power is transferred from one generation to another. His thesis is that "a clanic community [gathers] around a founding ancestor from whom all members originate" (1995:3). I will test Bujo's conclusions through a questionnaire on the status of the founding Shembe in the community.

Darrel M. Hostetter, a researcher on the Zion Swazis, surveys some representative views of ancestors among Swazi Christians and compares them with some Zulu Christians in South Africa. His work "Disarming the Emadloti: The

Ancestors" (1991) helps us see a general pattern and corpus of beliefs emerging with regards to ancestors. Hostetter quotes from a survey conducted among Zulu people in South Africa, where a series of questions were posed: "Does an ancestral spirit accompany a person to protect him and bring him good fortune?" and "Was Jesus Christ who lived on the earth the Supreme Being?" (1991:356). 69% of the respondents answered in the affirmative to the first question and to the second, 59.8%. Hostetter concludes that Zulu Christians were more likely to turn to ancestors than to Christ for solutions to their problems (1991:356).

In Kwame Bediako's work *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (1995), the author speaks of Christ as "Supreme Ancestor." Bediako says, " ...Christ, by virtue of his Incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension into the realm of spirit-power, can rightly be designated, in African terms, as Ancestor, indeed Supreme Ancestor" (1995:217). [35]

Summary

In this chapter I have stated the background to the problem and crafted the statement of the problem as I understand it from my study of the literature on African Traditional Religions, Zulu Traditional Religion, and those who have now joined the amaNazaretha Church.

In Chapter 2, I specifically look at both the African and Zulu traditional religions and focus on their views on God, spirits, ancestors, traditional leaders, and healing as expressed in their beliefs and practices. In Chapter 3, I offer an overview

of the history, beliefs, and practices of the African Initiated Churches (AICs), which then led into a study of the religious and cultural worldview of the amaNazaretha Church of Isaiah Shembe. The following two chapters, 5 and 6, I devote to my research findings and participant observation respectively. I interpret my research findings in Chapter 7, offering my conclusions and understanding of the amaNazaretha Church's theology and Christology they espouse in their beliefs and practices. Finally, in Chapter 8, I offer some missiological principles elicited from my study that may be generalized for other missionary contexts.

Notes

[1] See for example, David Barrett (1968) and Bengt Sundkler (1948).

[2] The architects of apartheid in South Africa developed a framework that classified the different races in the country. The White race in South Africa began with the arrival of the Dutch in 1652, followed by the British in 1820. Indians came to South Africa in 1860, upon the invitation of the British, to work as indentured laborers in the sugar and tea plantations with the option of settling in South Africa at the end of their contract. Indentured laborers continued to arrive in South Africa at regular intervals in the period between 1860 and 1911, when Indian immigration ended. Then by a continuing process of absorption and miscegenation between European colonists and the remnants of the indigenous Khoisan peoples of the Cape, over time a heterogeneous collectivity of people called the Coloured race emerged. The apartheid structure placed Whites at the top of the socio political ladder with the most privileges, followed by Coloreds, Indians, and then Blacks at the lowest rung of the ladder.

[3] See Walther Eichrodt (1961:303-306). The Nazarites were characterized by their extreme asceticism, and, among other things, they were distinguished by their long locks. Oosthuizen (1968b:36) states that "the significance of the Nazarites lay in their contribution to the strengthening of the sense of nationhood and of the religious basis on which it was built."

[4] Goody has shown that succession is never axiomatic. He adds, "Even in those systems we speak of as hereditary, some element of choice is always present, the extent of option varies greatly from next-in-line succession to 'dynastic election'" (1966:13). Rynkiewich, from his case studies conducted in Micronesia, elicits what he calls "five variables" that one may encounter in leadership succession. Three of the five variables seem to be consistent with the amaNazaretha Church: 1) "There was enough ambiguity in the rules to permit several candidates to interpret that they were the rightful successor to the deceased paramount chief: 2) In addition to the formal rules, succession depended on who could gain enough support to win the initial struggle, and leadership depended on the maintenance of support for the chief to exercise the prerogatives of office; 3) There were a variety of strategies for elimination of candidates and the usurpation of office, including assassination and warfare" (1974: 143-144).

[5] The amaNazaretha claim to have a following of four million adherents. However, in my estimation there are not more than two million adherents.

[6] See definition of terms (below) in this chapter.

[7] The study of African Traditional Religions (ATRs) follows in Chapter 3.

[8] See Appendix 2 for statistical data of interviewees.

[9] Given the oral nature of the amaNazaretha's theology, my scriptural hermeneutic will take the form of *narrative theology*—telling stories. Narrative is not just folktale but rather a form of divine revelation. Narrative is valuable for doctrine. For example, the New Testament uses stories from the Old Testament as a ground for doctrine. The Ten Commandments are embedded in narrative—"Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength," and the New Testament adds, "And love your neighbor as yourself" (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5; cf. Luke 10:27). Further, narrative theology according to Thiselton "witnesses to the personhood of God more effectively by proclaiming the history of the acts of God than abstract theological language which rehearses Aristotelian-like divine attributes of righteousness, holiness, and love" (1992:569). Also, the New Testament comes with a freshness of the revelation of Jesus Christ and keeps continuity with the Old Testament.

[10] The Catechism of the amaNazaretha Church was first published in 1940 under the leadership of Johannes Galilee Shembe, son of the founder Isaiah Shembe. The book begins with morning and evening prayers and followed by a longer section on the Sabbath liturgy. These are followed by the hymns, 242 in all. The first 219 hymns were composed by Isaiah Shembe before his death in 1935. The rest of the hymns were composed by Johannes Galilee Shembe.

[11] The amount of money individuals offer varies with their financial situations.

12 According to James Spradley (1980:58-62), the degree of involvement of the observer may be summarized in five categories from the lowest to the highest: nonparticipation, passive participation, moderate participation, active participation, and complete participation. In the first category (nonparticipation), the observer is not involved with the people or their activities in any way. In passive participation, the observer is present in the midst of the activities but does not participate in them. With moderate participation, the researcher endeavors to strike a balance between participation and non-participation. In the words of Spradley, the researcher "seeks to maintain a balance between being an insider and an outsider" (1980:60). In active participation, the researcher seeks to do what the local indigenous people do, so that the cultural norms and rules may be learned. In the final category, complete participation, the researcher is an ordinary participant without differentiation from others doing the same activity. An example here is riding a city bus daily like other ordinary people. Spradley offers a caution for those in this category, viz., that the closer one is to a situation the more difficult it becomes to study that phenomenon (1980:62).

[13] I recount my experience with meeting Vimbeni Shembe in Chapter 6 below.

[14] Maulana Karenga is professor and chair of the Department of Black Studies at California State University, Long Beach. He is also chair of the President's Task Force on Multicultural Education and Campus Diversity at California State University, Long Beach.

[15] Other Zulu terms are incorporated into the text of this study.

[16] I discuss Turner's classification later in Chapter 4 in greater detail.

[17] N.T. Wright is a New Testament theologian who has taught New Testament studies at Oxford, Cambridge, and McGill Universities, and is currently Bishop of Durham University, England. He delivered the lecture at the Center for Theological Inquiry, Princeton, New Jersey.

[18] Loubser is attached to the Faculty of Theology, University of Zululand, South Africa.

[19] Hans J. Becken in "Narrative Church History as Proclamation of the Gospel Message" (1990) affirms that "preaching by telling the story is different from sophisticated sermons in Western churches" (1990:173). While narrative fits into the thought patterns of a script-less society and oral communication is still part of their culture, there is every sign that they are in the stage of transition, moving away from a culture that was entirely script-less. This is evident among the amaNazarites who read from their Bibles and sing from their hymnbooks.

[20] Hexham teaches religious studies at the University of Calgary in Canada.

[21] Nyamiti defines "Brother-Ancestor" as "a relative of a person with whom he has a common parent, and of whom he is mediator to God, archetype of behavior and with whom—thanks to his supernatural status acquired through death—he is entitled to have regular sacred communion" (1984:23).

[22] Sundkler was a Swedish Lutheran missiologist who served as missionary to the Zulus in South Africa in the mid-1950s.

[23] Kitshoff (1996a:97) notes that whereas in 1913 there were 32 known independent churches in South Africa, by 1980 the AICs had grown to include 3,270 denominations with a membership of nearly six million" (1996a:97). See also Kitshoff (1994:97-103), "African Independent Churches: A Mighty Movement." See also G. C. Oosthuizen, "Indigenous Christianity and the Future of the Church in South Africa" (1997b). Oosthuizen says, "In 1959, fully 75 to 80 percent of all Black South African Christians were members of the mainline churches; only 12-14 percent were members of the AICs. By 1980, the mainline share of Black Christian population had dropped to 52 percent, while the AICs had increased to 27 percent; by 1991, the figures were 41 percent and 36 percent" (1997b:8).

[24] John Dube was founding member and first president of what is now the African National Congress, the political party in power in South Africa. He was the pastor of the American Board Mission working at Lindley Mission, neighboring Shembe's Ekuphakameni village. Dube was also the editor of the newspaper, *Ilange laseNatal*, a paper still published in Natal to this day.

[25] In his earlier work, *Bantu Prophets*, Sundkler (1948:283) concluded after attending some of the Shembe worship services that the 'Messianic Churches' firmly believed in a Black

Messiah. Gleaning from the content in their hymnal and sermons he believed that Isaiah Shembe had replaced Christ and thus became the mediator of the people. In his later work, *Zulu Zion* (1976), Sundkler states that in revisiting Shembe's hymns he admits that his earlier conclusions were "too Western, too dogmatic" (1976: 309).

[26] It should be noted that Becken conducted his research in the Johannes Galilee Shembe and Amos Shembe eras.

[27] However, Josiah U. Young, Professor of Systematic Theology at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington D.C., produced in 1993 his *African Theology: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography*, that covers a broad range of theological issues facing the African continent. It complements Turner's work produced more than ten years earlier, thus containing sources beyond Turner's time of publication.

[28] See also, Andrew Walls (1996) *The Missionary Movement In Christian History,* especially the chapter "The Challenge of the African Independent Churches" (111ff.) for a further discussion on terminology.

[29] See also, Harold Turner (1981), "New Vistas: Missionary and Ecumenical: Religious Movements in Primal (or Tribal) Societies." See also, Turner (1976b), "The Approach to Africa's Religious Movements."

[30] Oosthuizen (1992:28) quotes Shembe as saying, "I saw an angel opening its wings when I was asleep, but the voice of that angel was like the voice of my grandfather who said I should wake up. Immediately I saw many of my relatives...they were calling me to be a prophet."

[31] This work appears under a different title: *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches: Volume 1: Background and Rise of Major Movements*, 1971.

[32] Harold Turner, in *Living Tribal Religions* (1971b), would remind us that tribal people "differ very greatly in their beliefs and ways of life, and therefore their religious ideas and practices differ also and each should be studied in itself" (1971b:6). He, however, delineates the similarities and groups them together as the religions of tribal societies. Turner defines a New Religious Movement as "a historically new development arising in the interaction between a tribal society and its religion and one of the higher cultures and its major religion, involving some substantial departure from the classical religious traditions of both the cultures concerned, in order to find renewal by reworking the rejected traditions into a different religious system" (1990:697).

[33] See also his *Concepts of God in Africa* (1970) and his *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969).

[34] Pobee is an Anglican theologian from Ghana and served on the WCC Programme on Ecumenical Theological Education.

[35] See Bediako (1983), "Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions." Bediako says, "once Jesus Christ comes, the ancestors are cut off as means of blessing and we lay our power-lines differently…from the standpoint of the Gospel, God's saving activity towards us is focused on Christ, mediated through the Holy Spirit" (1983:35).

Chapter 2

African and Zulu Traditional Religions: Views on God, Spirits, Ancestors, Traditional Leaders, and Healing

The purpose of this chapter is to discover what aspects of African Traditional Religion are carried over when African traditionalists join the African Initiated Churches (AICs.). After a general survey of ATRs' beliefs and practices, this chapter will delineate more specifically Zulu beliefs and practices, since the majority of adherents in the amaNazaretha Church belong to the Zulu nation.

Africa: A Geopolitical and Demographic View

Africa is the second largest of the world's seven continents, occupying some thirty million square kilometers of land space. In terms of its population, Africa is the second largest populated continent, with 842 million people (McGeveran 2003:857), of which almost 97 percent are indigenous Black African. There are some 1800 known spoken languages in the continent with over three thousand ethno-linguistic peoples (Johnstone 1993:35). Within the 55 countries, more than 20 have mega-cities with an excess of one million people (Global Mapping International 1994:1).

According to Barrett's 2001 statistics (2001:13), Christianity claims more adherents than any other religion in Africa; some 46 % of its people (or 360 million) profess some form of the Christian faith. Islam, still striving for the soul of Africa, attracts some 41 % of the continent's population (317 million people).[1]

This figure includes the 130 million Muslims who live in the North African countries

(Johnstone 1994:36). Ethnoreligionists[2] make up 12% (97 million people) of the total African population (Barrett 2001:13). While African traditional religionists appear to be in the minority in the continent of Africa, I intend to show that while Africans have joined other religions, they have not totally distanced themselves from their former traditional beliefs and practices. The question I want to raise, taken from an African's perspective, is well stated in the words of Andrew Walls, "Who am I? What is my relation as an African Christian to Africa's past?" (1996:13).

Legend has it that Christianity first came to Africa via St. Mark in the year 42 A.D. (Baur[3] 1994:21).[4] However, Christianity's rapid proliferation was checked by the Muslim invasion in the seventh century (Neill 1964 [1990]:54), and since then Islam has dominated all of North Africa to this day. In its heyday, North Africa did produce some of Christianity's great thinkers and leaders, such as Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine, whose works still form the basis of our theology to this day. Mbiti, writing in the early 1970s, foretold, "A day will come when African Christians will take new forms of Christianity to Europe and America or revive Christianity in those areas" (Mbiti 1975a:184). What are these "new forms" of Christianity? Are they consistent with orthodoxy? So as to understand better the social, religious, and cultural beliefs and practices of members of the amaNazaretha church, one would need to cross over into the life-

world of the African. A starting point may be the beliefs and practices of African traditionalists.

What Are African Traditional Religions?

Africans live out their lives as religious people. They possess a set of rituals for every phase of life, beginning with conception, proceeding through the womb, then birth, infancy, puberty, initiation, marriage, and physical death to the "beyond" or afterlife (Stine and Wendland 1990:20-21). Thus "the practical role that religion plays in African society can be seen in almost every sphere of life" (Turnbull 1976:74).[5] Scholars have attempted the study of religions from different approaches: sociological, philosophical, psychological, functional and structural, to mention a few (Nida 1960:97-98; 1971a:243-244). Nida goes on to suggest that religion

> constitutes a componential feature of all the basic motivations [that produce] meaning with supernatural sanctions.... When this meaning takes on supernatural character and provides a mechanism by which people may establish communicative links with the supernatural, this is religion. (1971a:244-245)

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz in his work *The Interpretation of Cultures* attempts to relate culture to religion through his study of the behavior of individual groups. He offers a definition of religion that is helpful in analyzing the ritualistic and symbolic phenomena inherent in the African religio-cultural ethos. In this context I use the term "religio-cultural ethos"—a reference to the specific characteristics that go to make up the religion and culture of African people. Geertz sees religion as

> A system of symbols which acts to establish powerful and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (Geertz 1973:90)

A. H. Mathias Zahniser, complementing Geertz, says, "Religion falls within the broader category of 'symbol systems,'" adding that a system, "is an interconnected network of meaningfully related components" (Zahniser 1997a:30). For the non-African, or one who approaches African Religions from an emic perspective,[6] the internal logic of an otherwise complicated socio-religious system becomes intelligible when individual symbols and rites are seen as integral components of the larger whole. Wendland (1990:20)[7] illustrates this integrated wholeness of traditional African life, belief, and practices through the seven stages of the life cycle, with Religion at the center, thus:

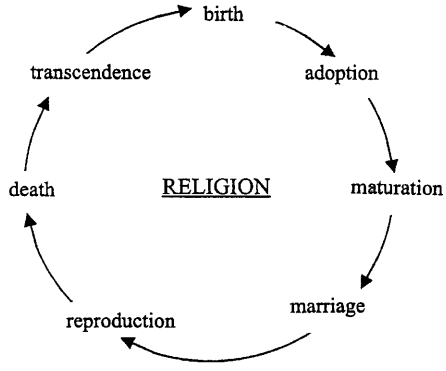

Figure 5.The Centrality of Religion in African Life
(after Stine and Wendland 1990:20)

The origin and early development of humankind, according to some scholars,[8] had its genesis in Africa, the birthplace of hominidae— family to which humans belong. Although consensus has not been reached on this point, some suggest that humans existed on the continent for some four million years (Platvoet 1996:47-48). It is Mbiti's claim that in some sense Africa "can be considered as the mother continent or origin of all peoples of the world" (Mbiti 1975:2). The three thousand ethno-linguistic groups with their unique cultures and dialects betray the existence of a people that has survived a long and protracted historical past. As regards their early religious ethos, the religion of any historic group is what one may call distinct, unique, and self-generated. Each cultural group took its natural surroundings, along with its inheritance, and created a religious response that permeated every aspect of life. Yet, the idea of the transcendence, the *Other*, was always present though implicit. Africa, therefore, must have a long religious history, but one whose origin is mostly irretrievable, save for some excavations of burial grounds that yielded "tools, trophies, ornaments, and red ochre [found on the remains of a child]" (Platvoet 1996:49).

To the serious observer, African religion may be evidenced in peoples' history, their "migrations, calamities, wars, invasions, hunting, fishing, food-gathering, domestication of animals, farming, mining, metal work, and settlement in villages and cities" (Mbiti 1975a:4-5). Religion shapes African life in its totality—people's culture, social and political activities, and economic well being.

Mbiti, who claims that "Africans are notoriously religious" (1969:2), articulates their religiosity thus:

> Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament. Although many African languages do not have a word for religion as such, it nevertheless accompanies the individual from long before birth to long after his physical death. (Mbiti 1969:2)

According to Wendland, African religion "is not an abstract philosophical system...it involves a dynamic application of the world-view to human character and conduct in their totality" (Wendland 1990:19-20). In the following diagram he illustrates his point that every aspect of life is laden with religious phenomena:

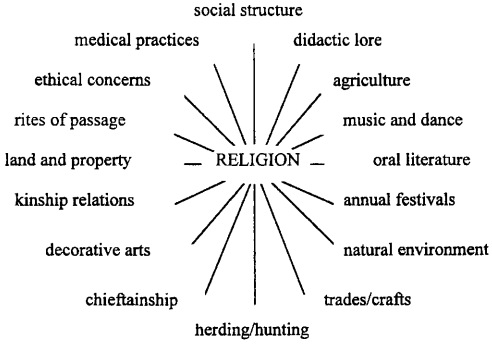

Figure 6. Facets that Make up African Religion
(after Stine and Wendland 1990:20)

The many facets that go to make up religion are analogous to the hub of a spoked wheel. Apart from its central position it also directs the forward motion of the whole system.

According to Mbiti, African Traditional Religion is also "pragmatic and realistic" (1975a:15). Its dynamism and openness to new ideas is evidenced in response to life's situations and needs as they arise. While African religions may not possess a "holy book," the religion is a progression of historical events indelibly imprinted in the hearts and upon the minds of African (Mbiti 1975a:15). Mbiti further asserts that "African religions have neither founders nor reformers. They may, however, incorporate national heroes, leaders, rulers, and other famous men and women into their body of beliefs and mythology" (1969:4). Each individual in the African tradition is a religious carrier.

African religiosity is a paradox in that it displays both diversity and unity evident among the various traditions and cultures across the vast continent. Hence is the ongoing debate as to whether one should speak of "African Traditional Religion" in the singular or the plural, "Religions."[9] This problem becomes evident as we later study specifically Zulu Traditional Religion (ZTR). Given their 3,000 ethno-linguistic groups, one can expect Africa Traditional Religion to be diversified in nature and scope, in that it signifies different things to different ethnic groups. Yet it could also be a unity in that there are distinct strands that run through all the African traditions, irrespective of where on the continent people are situated. What follows is a general view of African traditional beliefs and practices.

Beliefs and Practices

Africans construe life as being holistic. It would appear that there is no solid demarcation between the sacred and secular. Therefore, there is the saying "Our world is like a drum; if you beat one part, everything vibrates" (Mugabe 1991:344). We have earlier stressed that African religion pervades every aspect of African life, but it is a kind of "omnipresence" that easily eludes the casual observer, so much so that early Portuguese explorers to Africa claimed that Africans had no religion (Booth 1977:1).[10] With intentionality and patient study, one may discover the "pervasive qualities" that "underlie specific beliefs, myths, symbols and rituals" of African culture (1977:6).

I now explore some of the more relevant aspects of African Traditional Religion that will later have a bearing on our discussion of beliefs and practices in the amaNazaretha Church.

The idea of the creator God. Most Africans hold to some traditional image of God in their religious ethos. God is said to be the "Creator God," responsible for the primal origins of the world,[11] nature, and humanity. God is considered to be the ground of everything that exists although God does not directly control everything. In this sense, Africans would view God more in the sense of transcendence rather than immanence. Therefore, the God of Africans is said to be detached from human affairs, and for want of better terminology, a *Deus otiosus* or *Deus remotus.*

In his study *The Primal Vision* (1963), John V. Taylor, while conceding that the belief in a High God in African Traditional Religion is ambivalent, appeals to "the references [to the Creator God] everywhere in songs and proverbs and riddles, whose archaic grammatical forms attest their antiquity" (1963:75).[12]

In the absence of a spontaneous relationship with God, the African tends to turn to the more accessible spirit world. God is placed at the apex of the religious hierarchy, and consequently the only contact with God is through lesser gods and spirits (Mbiti 1971:95).

The question of God being either transcendent or immanent in the everyday lives of Africans is critical to the understanding of when and how Africans approach God the Supreme Being. Taylor says, "The African myth does not tell of men driven away from paradise, but of God disappearing from the world..." (1963:76). Consequently, "Man projects his inward sense of the lost Presence and fixes God in the sky. The pervasive Spirit becomes the remote and unknowable Creator, the First Cause, the Owner" (1963: 76).

In a more localized context, the Nupe of Northern Nigeria refer to God as "*Soko lokpa,*" meaning that "God is far away, yet in a more mystic sense he is present always and everywhere" (Taylor 1963:78).[13]

To highlight the fact that we are dealing with an issue of immense complexity, as far as human interaction with God is concerned in African religiosity, I cite a more recent scholar, Benjamin Ray, *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community* (2000). Ray comes to the conclusion that after

> Having formed the immutable structures of sky and earth and the orderly human cycle of birth, life, and death, the Supreme Creator God remains in the background like a distant ruler or patriarch, occasionally intervening but generally leaving the fortunes and misfortunes of everyday life to lesser agents, the gods and spirits. Both types of divinity, the One Creator God and the many lesser powers are essential to the full range of traditional religious experience. (2000:45)

Ray states that while Africans acknowledge the existence of a Supreme Being, the function and role of such a Being is understood differently across the continent. The question this raises for my inquiry regarding mediation in the African Christian context is "How are these beliefs and practices regarding the Supreme Being interpreted when Africans leave African Traditional religions and cross over to Christianity?" In other words if lesser gods, spirits and ancestors mediate between people and God, is Christ's mediation mitigated or annulled?

Laurenti Magesa claims that in African Religion "the universe is a composite of divine, spirit, human, animate and inanimate elements, hierarchically perceived, but directly related, and always interacting with each other" (2000:39). Magesa offers a convincing rationale for both God's reticence and familiarity with humankind in African Religion. Magesa explains,

> [T]he rebelliousness of humanity against God [i]s the reason for God's consequent withdrawal from humanity. Yet …if God is not now immediately and directly involved with human ethical life, human beings are still ultimately accountable to the Divine in all aspects. Since the original fault of humanity, God requires and deserves respectful distance, but does not seek non-involvement in the ethical life of humanity. (2000:43)

Among the Yoruba of Nigeria, the consequence of a rupture in the relationship between the Creator God Olodumare and one of his created gods,

Odudua, caused Olodumare to withdraw to the sky. Yet, he rules the world through lesser gods known as *orisha*. It is said that Olodumare is "transcendent, all-knowing, and all-powerful" (Ray 2000:10). For the Yoruba, Olodumare may still be invoked and praised, and people may bring to him their requests and needs (2000:10).

It would appear that in African Traditional Religion the existence of God is never doubted, though people are ambivalent in their understanding of God's transcendence and immanence. Yet it would be appropriate to suggest that God is both "ultimate and intimate"[14] in the everyday affairs of African people. More pointedly, if God is only transcendent or ultimate, the question of who are the intermediaries or mediators becomes crucial, when an African changes his allegiance from African traditional Religion to Christianity. I will raise this issue in Chapter 7.

Divinities. Wendland (1990:88), citing the Mulungu in Chewa and Lesa in Tonga as examples, sketches the hierarchial order in African cosmology.[15] Divinities in the African context refer to spiritual beings that are the agents or representatives of the Supreme Being. In the African religious hierarchical structure of the spirit world, people place divinities immediately under the Supreme Being. Africans have some of the aspects sketched below although their religious worldview is not totally confined to these aspects.

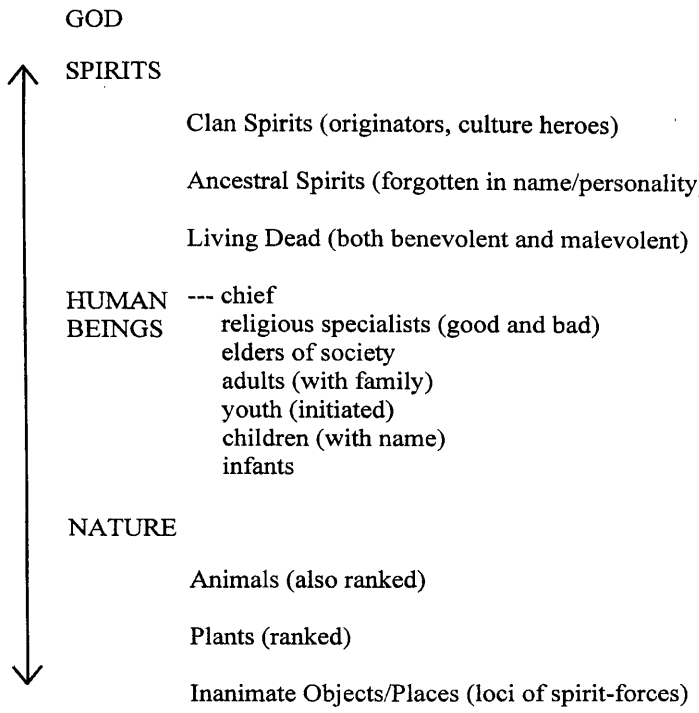

Figure 7. Heirarchical Structure of the Spirit World
(after Stine and Wendland 1990:88)

Divinities are thought to be created by God. According to Mbiti, "they are associated with Him, and often stand for His activities or manifestations either as personifications or as the spiritual beings in charge of these major objects or phenomena of nature" (Mbiti 1969:76). These "major objects of nature" may include the sun, mountains, seas, lakes, rivers, rocks, and boulders, objects both animate and inanimate (Parrinder 1962:43-52). Ray suggests that in some African religions, "God operates as a principle of ultimacy," bringing unity among the

lesser deities. They are intermediaries of the one God (2000:27). For example in the Yoruba culture people may be devotees of *Oshun*, the goddess who facilitates birth and promotes health and wealth, especially to women. In this instance the Supreme God Olodumare is relegated to the background but is always ever present (2000:27).

Another example of the role of divinities is evident among the Ashanti, who believe that God manifests God's presence through intermediaries. These intermediaries are known as *abosom.* It is believed that God created the *abosom* to protect people. These divinities are departmentalized according to people's activities, experiences, and socio-political structures (Mbiti 1969:76). They may be divinities of war, of smallpox, of harvest, of health, and even of healing. The number of divinities will vary with regard to the needs of a particular community. Idowu maintains that some of the divinities are no more than ancestors who because of their "prowess during their lifetime earned deification" (1973:172).

The question this aspect of African Traditional Religion raises for this research is whether people from African religions and cultures coming to accept Christianity still gravitate to these spirit beings in times of calamity or when human needs are left unattended or unresolved.

Ancestors: The living-dead. The closest link that African people have to the spirit world is through their ancestors. Ancestors may be defined as "the spirits of the socially significant deceased members of family, lineage, clan, and tribal groupings" (Kitshoff 1996a: 23). In terms of lineage, Dzobo asserts that an

ancestor is "one from whom one is descended and who is usually more remote in the line of descent than a grandparent" (Dzobo 1985:333).

Mbiti refers to ancestors as the "living-dead," a term now in common parlance in African literature. It is through the living-dead that the spirit-world becomes personal to African people. The living-dead are considered "people" who have not yet become spirits. They are said to visit their families from time to time, showing interest in intimate details of their families' everyday life. As guardians of the family's affairs, they communicate with the living head of the family. In some sense they act as mediators between their families and God. This role is intelligible to the African because the ancestor knows the family's needs; he was once a living member of that family. In addition, he has full access to communicating with God directly. Parrinder lends weight to this idea, saying, "In South Africa the ancestor spirits are the most intimate gods of the Bantu: they are part of the family or tribe and are considered and consulted on all important issues" (Parrinder 1976:57).

As for the specific activities of ancestors, Africans believe that they are not far away; they watch over their families "like a cloud of witnesses" (Parrinder 1976:58). The health and fertility of the family are of utmost concern, since the ancestor will seek rebirth in the same family. It is believed that the family land is the property of the ancestor; when the property is to be leased to other people, the ancestor should be first consulted. In Kenya, for example, the ancestors are

believed to fertilize the land and facilitate the growth of crops. At the time of harvesting, offerings, or the first fruits of the land, are brought to them.

Ancestors are known to speak in dreams to their relatives. These dreams may be of an instructional nature. The relatives are then expected to act accordingly. If the spirit appears to be pleased or angry, appropriate action is necessary on the part of the person or family. When the dream is not clearly discernable, one has to consult a *medium*. The medium, for an agreed-upon price, unravels the dream and instructs the person as to the necessary steps to be taken.

The relationship between the living relatives and the ancestor is ambivalent. The living relatives revere the ancestor and take solace in the fact that the ancestor has power to protect them. Yet the ancestor is also feared and from time to time has to be appeased with offerings through commemoration ceremonies. When evil or disaster befalls a family or tribe, it may be that the ancestor was either neglected or not consulted in some important matter. In this instance, the family or tribe coerce and placate the offended ancestor by means of sacrifices (Mbiti 1969:85).

In a more localized context, the Akan of Ghana believe that ancestors are those who have completed their role in the land of the living, and have departed to the place of the dead, a spiritual waiting place called *Uumbwardo*. *Uumbwardo* literally means God's house. According to Pobee, not all the dead are elevated to this status. The person in life who was bankrupt does not qualify to be an ancestor; neither is the one who dies tragically or through some loathsome disease such as leprosy. The ancestor is one who lived in an exemplary manner to a ripe old age

and who did much to enhance the prestige and well being of his immediate family, clan, and tribe (Pobee 1976b:8).

In this Akan community, people believe that ancestors are believed to give children to the living so that there will be continuity of the ancestral name. Ancestors are also responsible for a good harvest—hence, the commemoration of ancestors during the harvest festivals. Moral life in Akan society is said to be controlled by ancestors who provide the code of conduct. These codes are handed down from generation to generation, and offenders who abrogate the code are punished by sickness and even death. It is the responsibility of ancestors to provide a sense of cohesion and well being in Akan society (Pobee 1976b:9).

Making libations is the main religious form of showing respect, honor, or recognition to the cult of ancestors, at least for the Akan people. Before eating and drinking, before and after travel, a libation is offered to the ancestor. This act signifies the Akans' dependency on the dead for their well-being. At the community or tribal level, "the cult of ancestors is mediated by a ritual specialist such as a chief, linguist or priest" (Pobee 1976b:10).

Mediatorial role of ancestors among the Shona. The nature and functions of ancestors among the Shona people are nuanced differently. Daneel (1973:46-73), whose empirical research I summarize here, depicts the hierarchical structure where the ancestors, placed between the Supreme Being, *Mwari,* and the living, act in a mediatorial role. The ancestors represent Mwari, negotiate between the living relatives and Mwari, and carry out Mwari's instructions. Mediatorial

functions of ancestors in the Shona tradition are dependent on certain activities carried out by the living relatives. To court the favor of ancestors, living relatives remember the dead by according honor to them. The dead relative becomes a mediator only when the living relatives carry out an initiatory rite called the *kugadzira*, the initiatory rite that elevates the dead to the status of ancestor. Therefore, "The mediatory function of the living with respect to the dead is thus a precondition for the eventual mediation of the dead with God on behalf of men [people]" (1973:48). However, Daneel warns that one should not place too much emphasis on mediation, since ancestors also possess "great power." If the ancestors are correctly honored by the living relatives, ancestors are quite capable of meeting the needs of the living without the aid of Mwari.

The ancestors can serve positively and for the good of their society; there are also negative circumstances when ancestors can inflict harm on their relatives. We have already noted this fact with other traditions. Here sickness, death, and accidents are frequently attributed to the ancestors. Ancestors do not bring harm directly to their relatives, but they can withhold their protective powers from the people, thereby leaving them exposed to the enemy and the powers of evil. This understanding is akin to Christian thinking that God has two wills—God's *perfect* will and God's *permissive* will. Perhaps the latter would account for the calamities in the African worldview.

As in other African cultures, the Shona keep regular contact with their ancestors. From the side of the ancestors this contact is maintained through

dreams, and sometimes ancestors communicate their wishes through a medium. The living relatives maintain contact with the ancestors through symbolic ways. They offer the ancestors food during meals in the form of libations. Sometimes they talk with the ancestor through a specially designated object or icon. In the case of the Shonas, this object may be a beer-pot or a blanket. In view of the Shonas' belief in ancestors, the convert to Christianity would need to reassess the role of an ancestor in light of the work of Christ as mediator. This discussion leads us to consider more specifically whether ancestors are worshipped, venerated, or both.

Ancestor worship and veneration. That ancestors are an integral part, albeit a controversial one, of the religio-cultural ethos of the African world is well established. To take away the ancestors from Africans is to strip them of their dignity, but much more, to destroy their roots. The question often raised is whether Africans worship or venerate ancestors. To this question there has been a profusion of answers: many for worship and many for veneration. Still others have suggested that there is little or no difference between worship and veneration.[16]

In the Igbo culture of Southern Nigeria, for older people life becomes meaningful because they know the power and presence of ancestral spirits. Dickson says, "The father of the family begins his day by praying to them [ancestors], dedicating himself and his entire family to their protection, offering kola-nuts, and also palm wine when available" (Dickson et al., 1969:43). It would appear that in this Igbo community, ancestors are worshipped and venerated, and

libations are offered to them. Dickson also says that yearly feasts are held in honor of ancestors, and it is forbidden not to set out some food for the ancestors during suppertime (1969:43). It is an established fact that ancestors play a mediating role between the living and the Supreme Being in Igbo culture.

Jean-Marc Ela, however, argues against the use of the term *worship*. In reference to the terms "cult and worship," he says,

> ...the words do not have the sense they have for many Christians. 'Cult' and 'worship' are terms inappropriate to the African context in which man expresses in a relationship of communion his respect for the founders of the tribe. A family relationship should not be given the title 'cult' in the strict sense of the term. When people offer beer and food to the dead, they are very well aware they are not worshipping the dead, but are reliving a form of kinship with them, by actualizing it in an existential situation.... (1977:39-40)

Ela claims that the above action is not religious but a "mode of symbolic expression" (1977:40). From this study it is evident, however, that more often than not the sacred and secular are not dichotomized in African culture.

Idowu holds to the belief that "communion and communication are possible between those who are alive on earth and the deceased and that the latter have the power to influence, help, or molest the former" (Idowu 1973:179). Idowu cites scholars such as Parrinder, Danquash and Driberg on the question "Do Africans worship ancestors?" and concludes that those who too readily accept the affirmative are simply deluding themselves with "wishful thinking." However, those who categorically deny any form of worship accorded to ancestors, he

believes, have forgotten the complexity of the "working of the human mind" (1973:182). His own conclusion is that

> While technically Africans do not put their ancestors, as ancestors, on the same footing with Deity or the divinities, there is no doubt that the ancestors receive veneration that may become so intense as to verge on worship or even become worship. (1973:186)

Idowu, rather surprisingly, is emphatic that the cults of the ancestors do not rightly constitute African traditional religion and says, "it is a gross error to equate them with the religion" (Idowu 1973:186). He goes on to suggest that the ancestor cult is made up of people who although "dead" are still part of the family or community life by extension. The cult establishes a means of communion and communication between those who are living on earth and those who dwell in the spirit-world (1973:186).

My research has shown that Africans generally profess some connection with the ancestors. Sacrifices are often offered to ancestors at special stations along life's journey. Africans possess rites for every stage of life, beginning at conception and extending beyond the grave. In each of these phases, ancestors are remembered, venerated, and worshipped (for want of better terminology) and even offered sacrifices. As Idowu earlier pointed out, "Worship and veneration...are psychologically closer than next door to each other: the emotional indicator is always trembling between thee two, swinging to the one or the other in accordance with the emotional pressure or the spiritual climate of the moment" (Idowu 1973:182).

Healing. When a person becomes ill, Africans believe that the disorder is not only a physical matter but a spiritual one as well. Any illness implies that there is a fracture or imbalance between the metaphysical and the human world. For the illness to be eradicated, the cause of the imbalance or fracture needs to be established first. To achieve this end, the person afflicted with the illness approaches traditional healers or diviners. They are "directed by the ancestors and other spirits from whom they receive power, [and thus] utilizes this supernatural power for healing purposes" (Oosthuizen 1991:29).

The ancestors or spirits are the ones who supply the diviners with power. Consequently, the diviners have to keep in contact regularly with the ancestors and spirits (Oosthuizen 1968a:14). While diviners are somewhat different from herbalists and "medicine doctors," their work does overlap in that both endeavor to provide healing to the afflicted. However, the role of the diviner appears to be elevated, compared to that of the herbalist. Oosthuizen explains,

> The spiritual life of the tribe is the concern of the *Isangoma*. The continuous threat against the community by invisible negative, destructive forces of life makes the function of the *Isangoma* a necessity....A main function is to heal the sick and in his contact with the spirits through dreams and trance situations, which is a religious medical contact, his supernatural power is strengthened. He counteracts evil forces, especially those that cause disease, and he fights his way through the magical world and its dangers and attacks it right at the center. (1968a:15)

Summary of African Traditional Religion

I have noted that African Traditional Religion has provided Africans with fundamental beliefs and practices through a well-defined hierarchical system of

harmony, cementing relationships between humans on one hand and the Supreme Being on the other. What becomes clear as one studies African Traditional Religion is that at the center, at its core, is the consciousness of relationships. Thus, Mbiti's adage "I am because we are, and because we are I exist" (1969:106) speaks eloquently to the issue of life in its continuity from conception to the afterlife.

There exists an interconnectedness of individuals to each other and to forces higher and below the individual. In this regard, the African believes that there exists a force of divinity higher than the individual, namely, God. God is paradoxically both transcendent and immanent to people. God's transcendence is accepted as an inevitable fact, and because of God's power and might, ordinary humans are reticent to approach such a Supreme Being. However, Africans believe that God may be approached through intermediaries, such as ancestors.

Thus ancestors play an important role in the lives of the living. In Mbiti's terms, the "living dead" are considered to be closer to the Supreme Being, and consequently they are in a position to carry the requests of their living relatives to God. In this capacity ancestors become mediators between the living and God. Given the strategic place that ancestors hold in the lives of traditional Africans, the ancestor cult with all of its ritual and ceremony becomes an integral part of the religio-cultural life of Africans. The role of ancestors becomes an important consideration when traditional Africans accept the Christian faith. Now, the person and work of Christ has to be factored into their new consciousness. Do

ancestors still mediate between God and the living? Closely tied to the issue of ancestors is the question of healing. How strategic a role do African diviners and herbalists play in the lives of people who have accepted the Christian faith? Who mediates healing for the converted traditionalists? We pursue these questions in Chapter 7 below in the context of the amaNazaretha Church. Since the amaNazaretha adherents are predominately Zulu, a closer study of Zulu traditional culture and religion follows.

Zulu Worldview

In the province of Kwa Zulu Natal, on the southeastern side of South Africa, live the Zulu people. According to Beck, (2000:10) South Africa, and more specifically the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal, were the home of the oldest known fossils of humankind, dating back some 100,000 years.[17] In 1999 a 2,000-year-old mummified body, more than likely a Khoisan man, was discovered in the Eastern Cape (2000:10). The Khoisan are a collective group made up of the pastoralist Khoikhoi people and the hunting-gathering San people. At the beginning of the Christian era, they migrated from central Africa to the south encountering the Zulu and Xhosa people enroute (2000:11).[18]

The Bantu speakers, a family of more than 200 related languages comprises four main cultural-linguistic groups: Nguni, Sotho, Venda, and Tsonga (Morris 1965:24; Beck 2000:17). The Nguni[19] is the dominant group further delineated into northern and southern parts. The Zulus, part of the northern group that settled

in KwaZulu Natal, acquired their name sometime in the seventeenth century from the chieftain of a small clan, numbering some 1,500 subjects. A powerful young prince named Shaka who emerged as leader in the 19th century, welded together most of the Nguni tribes into the powerful Zulu nation, ruling from 1816 to 1828 (Buthelezi 1978:19). Dingane, Shaka's brother, assassinated him and usurped leadership only to be defeated in several wars, both by the Boers (Battle of Blood River, 1838) and the British (Battle of Isandhlwana, 1879) (Giles 1997:98).

In 1910, Natal became part of the Union of South Africa. This political event together with the death of Dinzulu, the last of the Zulu monarchs, brought to a temporary halt the era of the Zulu monarchy.

Zulu religion is cohesive and relational—a relationship between the natural and supernatural, the living and the dead, and higher spiritual beings. At the top of the religio-cultural hierarchy is the supreme deity. In the Zulu religious tradition this supreme deity operates and manifests his presence through several intermediaries (Jafta 1992b:79).

Zulus approach the Supreme Being through the next level of beings, namely, spirits and ancestors, or the "living-dead."[20] It is through the living-dead that the spirit world becomes personal and accessible to African people. The living-dead are considered "people" who have not yet become spirits. They are said to visit their families from time to time, showing interest in the intimate details of their families' daily lives. In some sense they act as mediators between their families and God. This idea is credible to Africans because they believe the

ancestors know the family's needs, since the ancestors were once living members of that family, and also because they have full access to communicating with God directly (Nyamiti 1984:15-16). Parrinder (1976:57), lending weight to this idea, says, "In South Africa the ancestor spirits are the most intimate gods of the Bantu: they are part of the family or tribe and are considered and consulted on all important issues."

The Zulu family is patriarchal; men are heads of their families and the sole figures of authority. Marriage is exogamous. *Lobola,* bride-wealth, is still practiced by the traditional Zulu. Usually a gift of cattle is offered to the bride's family. In an urban environment, however, it is not unusual to offer money as *lobola*. Given South Africa's living conditions and the fact of urbanization, Zulus live in two worlds: an urban world where men work in the city and live in hostels away from their families, and a rural world where family members live in small homesteads or kraals with subsistence farming their chief means of survival. It is not uncommon today to see younger Zulu women working and living in the cities of South Africa, having traded their traditional roles of tending farms and children for hectic city life.

The rural-urban paradox is very evident among Shembe members. In my previous visits to the Sabbath services in the inner city, I observed Shembe men coming to the services dressed in Western attire (formal suits and ties), carrying attaché cases in one hand and umbrellas in the other. The attaché case contained their white religious dress, headband, and other vestments that are worn at these

services. Within minutes the "Western executive" became the African religio-cultural person, only to revert to the "Western" person again after the service. Today Zulus in the city dress no differently than other modern urbanites. However, Zulu cultural dress is worn at religious and cultural ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, dances and commemorative holidays. The amaNazaretha Church is a typical example of those time-honored Zulu traditions that are retained and observed, especially in the annual dances held in January and July (Becken 1967:139-149).

From my study of the literature and my previous visits to the Shembe Church, it would appear that the leader, Vimbeni Shembe, and ancestors do play a role in the spiritual life of the church; however, to what extent, and how those roles relate to the person and work of Christ is unclear. This study endeavors to discern the Christology that is evident in the Shembe Church.

According to Berglund (1976:42), Zulu prayer is seldom directed to God. One of this scholar's informants said, "We do not speak of him [God] as if he were our acquaintance. So we simply keep quiet and say nothing" (1976:42). Zulus claim that their reticence to communicate with the Supreme Being is that they are intentional about safeguarding the integrity and the honor of God. In the preliminary testing of my interview schedule, some interviewees stated that they did not pray directly to God, but that prayers were made via an intermediary, Shembe, or the ancestors. Since ancestors mediate on behalf of the Zulus, their idea of Christian prayer becomes important. My study endeavor to clarify the

ideas held by members of the Shembe Church on the relationship of Christ to God, and to the people, in the light of the views they have always held of the ancestors. This view raises the question of whether the Shembe Church is a Christward movement.

John Pobee, while conceding that culture is never static, maintains that "Christianity, Islam, secularism, political change, and the whole drift of the present age have combined to undermine African cultures and traditional religions" (1979:44). While I accept that culture is dynamic and always changing though often in imperceptible ways, I would add that globalization and urbanization have of late also contributed to the erosion of traditional religion and culture in the continent of Africa. According to UNICEF's statistics,[21] 57% of the South African population now resides in urban areas. Zulus in South Africa occupy various economic sectors—some university professors, school principals and teachers, medical doctors and nurses, business administrators, and still many more as laborers doing menial chores to eke out a living in a struggling fledgling environment— post-apartheid South Africa. Yet, as my research shows, the Zulus in South Africa have consciously endeavored to maintain fundamental aspects of their traditional religion and culture in their daily lives.

I wish to demonstrate that these aspects of traditional religion and culture are evident in the beliefs and practices in the amaNazaretha Church. Their implications are discussed in chapter seven below. Here I summarize some key

aspects of tradition and culture that are pertinent to the study of amaNazaretha Church.

The Idea of God

Early travelers and missionaries observed that the Zulus acknowledged the existence of a Supreme Being whom they considered responsible for creation (Shooter 1857:159; cf. Thorpe 1991:35). Joseph Shooter, an early researcher in Natal (1857), discovered through interviews that Zulus believed in a superior being, a Creator-God, even before the first Western missionaries arrived. Shooter observed that

> The Kafirs of Natal and the Zulu-country have preserved the tradition of a Being whom they call the Great-Great and the First Appearer or Exister. He is presented as having made all things--men, cattle, water, fire, the mountains, and whatever else is seen. (1857:159)

The Zulu name for God is *uNkulunkulu*, "Great-Great One." The "First Appearer or Exister" is another name for God, which in Zulu is *uMvelinqangi.* Henry Callaway,[22] who worked among the Zulus in the latter part of the 19th century, shows that Zulus believed in a Creator-God, but this God was unknown to them. Callaway's research shows that Zulus had two names for the Supreme God, namely, *Unkulunkulu* and *Umvelinqangi* (1970: 1-104). According to Callaway, missionaries added one other name, *Utikxo* (1970:105). Nonetheless, Callaway's conclusions are that none of these names accurately represent the Christian understanding of the Supreme Being, God. He says, "For there is no name, whether *Utikxo*, or *Morino*, or *Unkulunkulu*, which, without possessing any

primary signification referring to divinity, has not much, both etymologically and traditionally, which is highly objectionable, and calculated to mislead the young convert" (1970:112-113). Oosthuizen adds that "the Zulu creation myth leaves many questions unanswered with regard to the relationship between Unkulunkulu and Umvelingqangi" (1968a:2).

Berglund ascertained that just as in the Hebrew language, God is known by God's attributes (Jehovah Jireh, Jehovah Shalom, among others), likewise, in the Zulu tradition, God has many names, and each name is representative of his attributes or functions. For example, the Zulu words *uSomandla* and *uMninimandla* tell us that God is both almighty and powerful (Berglund 1976:36). However, it is not clear whether Zulus believe in one Supreme Being with many functions, or whether there are lesser beings who control the various aspects of creation, such as the weather and human beings. Among Zulus, prayer is not offered directly to the Supreme Being because of the awe, esteem, and respect they hold for such a being. Zulus follow a hierarchical line of communication that begins with the living elders, and diviners and then channels via ancestors to the Supreme Being (Thorpe 1991:36). In Zulu traditional religion, *uMvelinqangi* is the name more often used than any other. My own field research among the amaNazaretha, however, shows that the name for God most often used is *Unkulunkulu*. Although the Supreme Being is seldom directly approached by people, he still occupies a significant place in the hierarchy of Zulu cosmology (Boot 1991:116).

Regarding the one who is worshipped, when Callaway asked the question one informant responded, "There are none [who pray to *Unkulunkulu*]. They pray to the *amatonga* [ancestral spirits]; they honor them that they may come and save them (1970:42). The informant continued, "in the process of time we have come to worship the *Amadhlozi* [another term for ancestral spirits] only because we know not what to say about *Unkulunkulu*; for we do not even know where we separated from him, nor from the word which he left with us" (1970:44).

Ancestors

Zulus do believe in a Supreme Being; however, they also believe that this being is inaccessible, remote, and withdrawn from being involved in human affairs (Thorpe 1991:36). Consequently, the distance between the Supreme Being and people is so vast that out of necessity they must approach lesser spiritual beings for guidance and assistance in the exigencies of life.

Although the idea of transcendence is evident in the Zulu understanding of God, it is not akin to the Deistic understanding that was theorized in 18th century Europe, that God created the world and was then separated from the creation. According to Zulus, God is active in the daily existential lives of people. God's interaction with humankind is expressed through the hierarchical structure of Zulu cosmology.

Here the ancestors appear to occupy a critical role in the lives of the Zulus. The Zulu understanding of the role of ancestors is functionally similar to the following perspectives on ancestors in other parts of Africa. Fortes stresses the

integral place of ancestors in the life of Africans in general: "whenever it occurs, ancestor worship is rooted in domestic, kinship and descent relations, and institutions. It is described by some as an extension of these relations to the supernatural sphere, by others as a reflection of these relations, yet again as their ritual and symbolic expression" (1965: 122).

Pobee from Ghana offers another perspective that ancestors are "those who have gone before.... The family consists of the living, the dead, and the still unborn. It is not only the living. Consequently, these ancestors, though dead, are still believed to be concerned with and involved in the affairs of the living" (1976b:8). However, it is Mbiti who offers a general African perspective of ancestors whom he refers to as the "living dead." He describes such an individual as, "a person who is physically dead but alive in the memory of those who knew him or her in life as well as being alive in the world of the spirits. So long as the living dead is thus remembered, he or she is in the state of personal immortality" (1969:25). Other scholars refer to ancestors as *shades* so as to distinguish those who affect daily lives from lineal relatives who upon death have no direct intervention in the lives of the living relatives.[23] Thorpe adds that older people in the Zulu community are considered ancestors as well, as they "are already on their way to ancestorhood and are accorded due respect" (1991:38). The respect and honor paid to living elders and those recently dead are the same in Zulu culture. The difference is the method of approaching the elders who are now ancestors, since communication is one-way, or a monologue, and is less frequent that that

which is conducted with respected elders who are still alive (Kopytoff 1971:133).[24]

Upon the death of a person, family members bring back the deceased person to his or her former home (Congdon 1985:296). This "bringing back" is not a literal or physical event, but is ceremonial. The ceremony takes place approximately one year after the death of the individual. It is referred to as the *ukubuyisa idlozi* (bringing home of the spirit) ceremony.[25] Oosthuizen describes the ceremony thus: "At the *ukubuyisa* ceremony, the putting into office of the ancestor, a small piece of meat is burnt with *impepho* (which gives a fragrant smell) as it is prepared for the shades..." (1968a:21). The ancestor, upon installation, officially assumes responsibility for the wellbeing of the living relatives. The relationship between ancestors and the living relatives is ambivalent; it may be both punitive and benevolent. When ancestors are propitiated and sacrifices offered on their behalf, it is believed that the ancestors proffer material blessings upon their living relatives. On the other hand, if they are neglected or forgotten, living relatives are punished (Nxumalo 1980:10).[26] The head of the household is subject to the ancestor and has the primary responsibility for the cultic activities.

Jabulani Nxumalo, after conducting a funeral service for a Zulu child, recounted this piece of communication between the father of the dead child and the ancestors. The body of the child lay near the *emsamo* in the main hut of the kraal. The father squatting next to the dead body addressed the ancestors with

these words: "You members of the lineage of N.N.[27] we beseech you to please kindly receive this child into your midst as we are about to accompany him bringing him to yourselves" (Nxumalo 1980:12). Just as ancestors are notified about the birth of children, ancestors are informed when people die.

Communication. Ancestors communicate with their living relatives in several ways. Zulus believe that the spirits of ancestors inhabit snakes and visit their living relatives (Makhathani 1965:156). When such a snake appears in their home Zulus treat the snake with respect by offering it milk. When the creature leaves the home, the householders are content that they acknowledged the presence of the ancestor and that the ancestor was pleased with the hospitality respect received (Congdon 1985:297).

More frequent communication between ancestors and their living relatives occurs through dreams. Ancestors sometimes identify themselves by revealing their names and at other times through some characteristic known by the family member who has had the dream (Anderson 1993:27). Anderson cites one example where an individual was killed in a motor accident and family members went to a diviner to ascertain the reason for the victim's death. The diviner informed them that the deceased person had failed to obey the "rules of the ancestors as revealed in a dream," hence the accident and subsequent death of the victim (1993:28).

Guidance and protection. Ancestors are also known to offer guidance and protection to living relatives. Ngubane, a Zulu researcher who wrote his Masters thesis on the subject *The Role of the amadlozi/amathonga as seen in the writings*

of W B Vilakazi,[28] cites a case where a woman, Nomanzi, had a dream in which her grandmother urged her to leave her village without delay. The woman and her two friends left the village. No sooner had they left than the village was surrounded by unknown assailants who massacred all the people in the village that same night. I was told a similar story where the ancestors appeared to a woman in a dream urging her to leave her home because her separated husband was on his way to murder her. The woman left her home in the thick of night and subsequently heard that her husband did indeed come to her lodging that night to harm her. It is clear from the above examples that Zulus believe their ancestors possess the capacity to lead and guide them, while at other times the ancestors allow danger to befall the living when the ancestors have been forgotten or ignored.

It is the traditional view among the Zulus that the ancestors are constant companions to their relatives and thus considered to be omnipresent. Hammond-Tooke speaks of this unique attribute of ancestors when he says, "invisibility, and the ability to be in a number of places at once, feeds power into the state of ancestorhood" (1978:137). Consequently it would appear that the ancestors are always near their relatives, and that they do not carry out their responsibilities from a distance (Ngubane 1984:62).

Deification

In Zulu culture prominent leaders, royalty, and chiefs are deified and remembered long after their death. Elders, chiefs and royalty are not only

remembered and respected long after death, but serve as maintainers of tradition and values that the living perpetuate and model in everyday life. Moral life in a given tribal society is sanctioned by the ancestors (Pobee 1976b:9). Zulus believe that "the deification of some of the 'dead' ancestors, especially those in authority, is... a grasping back to the source of everything, a way of maintaining contact with the supernatural world" (Oosthuizen 1968a:3).

According to Dzobo "...a human being as a unique individual is less important than a human being as an individual link in the chain of generations" (1985:335). Consequently, life's creative powers that have their source in God are not for the sole benefit of the individual, but rather pass through the person to others in the lineage. Therefore, when one participates in the ancestor cult, one knows that the creative power transcends the individual, yet one is still part of the creative power of life (1985:335).

Kings, chiefs, and diviners are said to be carriers of "life force" or power, and such power enables them to offer "benefits, protect, heal and even hurt" people (Oosthuizen 1968a:6, 7). The Zulu king or chief thus "forms an important link with the supernatural world" (1968a:10). In the Zulu religious system, the absence of priests brings to the fore the critical role of the family head in ceremonies important to the individual family. Where the community as a whole is concerned, the king or chief plays a prominent role in religious affairs. According to Krige (as quoted by Oosthuizen, "[The king or chief] is the highest symbol in the Zulu society of what is powerful: he is the personification of law,

the representative of the royal ancestors, and thus the center of ritual....Treason against the Chief is the same as treason against the whole people, for the Chief is the symbol of the unity of the tribe and as such sacred" (Oosthuizen 1968a:10). Even long after death such leaders are remembered, and their traditions, customs, and laws are revered and respected among the tribe and community. Their influence is the bedrock for the social and religious practices enacted in the daily life of the Zulu.

The role and status of Isaiah Shembe (1887-1935) become relevant to this study when we consider the influence and awe that the founder of the amaNazaretha Church is given. The role and status of Vimbeni Shembe in the church today also comes into question in the light of the influence of Isaiah Shembe, the founder.

Healing

In the Zulu worldview, the concept of health transcends the physical. Healing is viewed holistically, thus good health means more than a healthy body (Ngubane 1977:28). Illness for the Zulu is more than just a physical or mental disorder; it is also a religious matter (Mbiti 1975a:134). In Zulu thought, life is a gift from the creator to enjoy; this life is not lived in isolation but in community. Therefore, illness experienced by one member of the community affects the whole community. In this regard Placide Temples (1959:44) suggests that the goal of life for the Zulu is to live well, and this kind of life is achieved through the acquisition of "vital force" (1959:44). "Vital Force" or power to live well "is preserved and

strengthened by prayers, sacrifices, and rituals, wisdom and proper conduct" (Thorpe 1991:112).

Diviners

Identifying the cause of illness, the treatment, and the prognosis is the task of the diviner (*isangoma*). The diviners (male or female) do not attain their status by their own free will and choice. The potential diviner receives his or her calling through revelation from one's ancestral spirit, and such a call is irresistible (Callaway 1970:259). Ancestors or spirits are sources of power for the diviner. According to Oosthuizen, the diviner "is a medicine man or woman whose medicine has magical rather than pharmaceutical value" (1968a:14).

The diviner's function in Zulu society cannot be underestimated, as he or she possesses power to identify and understand spiritual phenomena which are beyond the comprehension of ordinary people. Such power is obtained only from the ancestor (Bryant 1917:143). Further, the diviner also holds a strategic position in Zulu society, as he or she is concerned about the spiritual well-being of the community, always looking out for threats against the community from "invisible, negative and destructive forces (Oosthuizen 1968a:15).

I was a participant observer at a session where the *Isangoma* (diviner) attended to some male and female clients. The diviner in this instance asked the client a series of questions, then went into a trance, her face contorted. She began to speak in a voice that resembled that of an old man. After some time she returned to her normal self. All that she had communicated in the male voice

while in a trance, the client affirmed to be correct, saying that he heard the voice of his grandfather. She gave the man some advice, and he left after paying the required fee.

In the Zulu worldview people perceive Western medicine to be merely a means of treating symptoms. For Zulus unless the cause of the illness is determined, any treatment is thought to be superficial. The cause is usually attributed to the disruption of unity resulting in stress on the individual and the group (Thorpe 1991:111). Oosthuizen concludes,

> While Western medicine has become divorced from religion, and a split has taken place in treating the body, mind, and soul by the physician, psychiatrist, and priest, respectively, and the social worker has been concentrating on social problems, the diviner relates to all these issues as a trusted person in the community. Religion remains a major significance in healing procedures among...traditionalists [and] those from independent/indigenous churches.... (1991:47)

In Zulu culture the *isangoma* or diviner is not the only person responsible for administering healing to the afflicted. Medicine doctors and herbalists also engage in healing activities. While they also serve an important function in the life of the Zulu, this study is concerned with the influence Zulu traditional religion has in the amaNazaretha Church and especially the transference of the role of the diviner to Vimbeni Shembe and the founder Isaiah Shembe.

Summary

In this chapter I have summarized the beliefs and practices of African traditionalists generally and, more specifically, those of the Zulu culture. I have

shown that African religion and daily life cannot be dichotomized. Therefore, to separate what is cultural from what is religious or to separate the sacred from the secular is impossible as all of life is sacred for the African. The missiological challenge is to find ways to contextualize Christian beliefs in Zulu culture and be faithful to Christian orthodoxy without demeaning the indigenous culture. To what extent this occurs in the AICs and more specifically the amaNazaretha Church (Chapter 4) will become clear later in this dissertation.

In Chapter 3, I engage the reader in a brief excursion into the history, rise, and development of the African Initiated Churches (AICs). Here I raise the question as to how much of traditional religious belief is carried over when Africans come to Christian faith and join an African Initiated Church. The chapter concludes with a brief study of the largest AIC in Southern Africa, the Zion Christian Church (ZCC).

Notes

[1] Barrett's statistics appear to be conservative as compared with statistics offered in the 2003 edition of *The World Almanac and Book of Facts* quoted above. The *World Almanac* estimates the Christian population in Africa to be 368,248,000 and the Islamic population as 325,556,000 people in 2002 (2003:638). In terms of percentages Christians make up some 44% and Muslims 39% of the total population in the continent of Africa.

[2] Barrett defines "Ethnoreligionists" as "followers of a non-Christian or pre-Christian religion tied closely to a specific ethnic group, with membership restricted to that group; usually animists, polytheists, or shamanists. Older terminology: pagans, heathens, tribal religionists, traditional religionists" (2001:28).

[3] Fr. John Baur, a priest from Switzerland has served in Africa since 1956, teaching Church History in seminaries in Tanzania, and Kenya.

[4] See Elizabeth Isichei (1995:17). Isichei appeals to Eusebius in his *Church History* written in 324 A.D. where he claims that Mark was responsible for taking the gospel to Africa. Adrian Hastings (1994:5), also appeals to the writings of Eusebius that Mark had taken the gospel to Africa, establishing the church in Alexandria.

[5] However, Turnbull also claims that generalizations made of African religion and culture can be tenuous and cautions against them. See also his *Lonely African*, 1962.

[6] I use the term "emic perspective" in the context of one studying a specific culture from within the group or people so that one may accurately describe or narrate beliefs and practices one observes pheomenologically.

[7] Wendland, who has a PhD in African Literature, teaches in a seminary in Zambia and has worked the Chewa and Tonga Bible translation projects. He co-authored the work *Bridging the Gap* (1990) with Philip Stine.

[8] See for example, Jan Platvoet, et. al. (1996:47-48).

[9] Idowu makes a case for African Traditional Religion in the singular: "There is a common Africanness about the total culture and religious beliefs and practices in Africa. This common factor may be due either to the fact of diffusion or to the fact that most Africans share common origins with regard to race and customs and religious practices" (1973:103).

[10] Booth, who is Professor of Religion at Miami University, Ohio, teaches courses on African civilization. He has contributed to journals such as *Africa Today* and *Religion in Africa* on subjects such as "Time and Change in African Traditional Thought."

[11] There are several myths concerning creation and the role God plays in the African worldview. Benjamin Ray, like Mbiti and E. Bolaji Idowu, among others, whose works have shaped theological discourse about African religions, offers several of these stories that God is always an integral part of the African religious and cultural worldview, albeit at times a distant entity. Recourse to God was through intermediaries. See Ray's work, *African Religions: Symbol. Ritual, and Community*, 2000.

[12] For example Taylor quotes some ancient songs and poems that reveal the presence of a Supreme Being in African thought: "The cattle shelter under the same tree with God;" "Wherever the elands graze in herds, there is God;" "God is in the great trunk and in the low branches" (1963:75).

[13] Taylor offers several other examples of localized views of God. He says, "There are a few African tribes—the Ashanti, the Dogon, the Ambo and perhaps three or four more—in which the Supreme God was actively worshipped in the traditional religion with a cult and a priesthood; but in the great majority no shrines are raised to him and no sacrifices offered. People may pray to him still in moments of special need" (1963:78).

[14] "Islam & Judaism": Class Notes Fall 1997. Mathias Zahniser (1997b) uses these terms to help explain God's transcendence and immanence

[15] Wendland's hierarchy may not represent the religious worldview of all Africans. However, what is consistent is the understanding that between humans and the Supreme Being are lesser spirit beings.

[16] The question of worship or veneration is not confined to academic discussion among scholars, both African and non-African. Some of my interviewees, for example, brought up this issue even before I raised questions about the status of ancestors, insisting that they did not worship ancestors, but only honored them. See explanation of terms in Chapter One.

[17] In Roger B. Beck's "The History of South Africa," the author argues for the existence of some form of ancient human life in the sub-continent of Africa by citing the discoveries of archaeologists such as Dr. Ron Clark who in December 1998 discovered a skeleton and skull in a cave in Krugersdorp. This find was preceded by Dr. Raymond Dart's discovery of a small skull in the Northern Cape in 1924. Hence, the author's claim that southern Africa is the "possible cradle of humanity" (Beck 2000: 9).

[18] See also Paul Maylam (1986) for a fuller discussion of the history and composition of South African peoples.

[19] The Nguni may be described as a broad based linguistic family made up of Zulu and Swazi in the north and the Xhosa, Thembu, Mfengu, Mpondo and the Mpondomise in the south.

[20] The term was first used by John S Mbiti (1975a:63) referring people who died recently and are remembered for up to four or five generations by their families, friends and relatives. The term "living-dead" distinguishes them from those who died long before that.

[21] UNICEF (United Nation's Children's Fund) figures were compiled in 2001.

[22] Henry Callaway was a missionary doctor from England who worked among the Zulus in the former Natal Province (now Kwa Zulu Natal) of South Africa beginning in 1854. He studied Zulu and was responsible for translating part of the Bible in Zulu. His definitive work is "The Religious System of the AmaZulu" first published in 1870. For scholars today, Callaway's writings have become a standard reference on the beliefs of the Zulu people. The 1970 edition is a facsimile reprint of the original version.

[23] For example, Martin West, "The Shades Come to Town: Ancestors and Urban Independent Churches," in *Religion and Social Change in Southern Africa: Anthropological Essays in Honor of Monica Wilson*, ed. Michael G. Whisson and Martin West Cape Town: Philip David with London: Rex Collings, 1975, pp.185-6, refers to the work of Monica Wilson where she differentiates between shades and ancestors is that "relatives who have died are ancestors, while the shades are more specifically dead people who are believed to affect the living directly" (West 1975:185).

[24] Igor Kopytoff is Professor of Anthropology at University of Pennsylvania. He has conducted extensive research in several parts of Africa and is the author of many monographs and articles on ancestors in Africa.

[25] Frans H. Boot, anthropologist from University of the Western Cape, South Africa, recorded this response with a minister regarding the *ukubuyisa* ritual: "Even among Christians the ukubuyisa is performed so that the spirits of the deceased may be guardian angels to their children. If the living do something wrong the spirit reprimands them and orders them to stop it. When a person dies, the spirit remains at the home to look after the inhabitants of the kraal. This is true for both Christians and non-Christians. These spirits communicate with God and intercede on behalf of the living. They ask God to forgive the sins. They protect and punish" (Boot 1991:127). This response, from a Lutheran minister, accentuates the complexity of the ancestor cult and its implications for the everyday life of the Zulu. The status and role of Christ becomes the all-important question when one considers the cultural role ancestors have in the Zulu worldview.

[26] Jabulani Nxumalo is a lecturer at St. Joseph's Cedara Seminary, Peitermaritzburg, South Africa.

[27] N. N. are probably the initials of the interviewee whose identity the author wanted to protect.

[28] Benedict Wallet Vilakazi (1906-1947), a Zulu, was the first African to teach in the all white University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in 1935, teaching Bantu languages.

Ngubane elicits cultural Zulu traditions and anecdotes from the literary works penned by Vilakazi.

Chapter 3

An Overview of the History, Beliefs, and Practices of the African Initiated Churches (AICs)

The momentous growth of African Initiated Churches[1] is one response by Africans to the necessity of indigenizing the gospel so that it meets the felt needs of its adherents. Rather than repeat the historical traditions handed down to them, the African Initiated Churches today seek ways to give expression to the gospel in their own idiom while endeavoring to be faithful to the Christian gospel and the biblical text.

This chapter investigates the phenomenal rise of several of the African Initiated Churches in South Africa. This investigation sets the stage for our specific study on the amaNazaretha Church of Isaiah Shembe in Chapter 4.

Phenomenal Growth

The growth of the church in Africa is surely one of the surprises of the past century; a review of some of the early literature attests to this fact, where the AICs are one example. Bengt Sundkler, the noted missionary observer, in his incisive work describing new indigenous Christian churches, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (1948, 1961) could not envision the impact of the movement, and concluded, "the syncretistic sects were the bridge over which Africans are brought back to heathenism" (1961:297). However, in his later book, *Zulu Zion and Some Swazi Zionists,* he acknowledged his error, saying, "From the point of view of

those involved, Zion was not turned to the past, but to the future and was their future" (1976:305). Rather than a steady retrogression to tribal and syncretistic practices, the surprise became evident in the sustained progression, even an avalanche of movement, toward Christianity. Yet, as this study will show, some AICs have moved away from orthodox Christian positions and thus would likely fall into the category of what Oosthuizen (1968b) called "post-Christian" or in the terminology of Turner (1979b) "New Religious Movements."

According to Daneel, there are more than 7000 African Initiated Churches in Africa, with more than 30 million adherents (1987:25).[2] In South Africa alone, there are some 5,000 groups, the largest among them being the Zion City Church-ZCC. According to Barrett's (1995) statistics, there are some eight million adherents in the two largest and better known churches in South Africa, the ZCC (seven million) and the amaNazaretha Church (approximately one million) (2001:681).

Terminology

The problem of employing an adequate nomenclature that would be descriptive as well as consistent with the ethos of these churches has long been debated.[3] In times past, Sundkler, Barrett, Oosthuizen, Turner, and Daneel have all reflected on how best to characterize the AICs. Sundkler referred to the AICs as "Bantu Independent Churches" in his work *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (1948). He argued that the name "Native Separatist Churches," as used by the South African government, was unacceptable to the indigenous African people.

Sundkler claimed that the word "native" is pejorative and is despised by the local indigenous African people, while the term "Separatist" could equally apply to White secessionists as much as it does to Africans (1961:18). He used the term "Bantu Independent" "as referring to such religious organizations as, in their desire for independence from the Whites have seceded from mission churches" (1961:18). He probably was influenced by the fact that D. Westermann (*Africa and Christianity* 1935) had already also used the term "Independent." While Sundkler argued for the use of the term "Independent," in the new chapter added to his 1961 edition of his work *Bantu Prophets In South Africa*, he surprisingly gravitated to the use of the term "separatist."

Barrett also argued for the term Independent in his *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (1968). He reasoned that

> [t]he term is...a good description for the widespread phenomenon in which large numbers of former adherents of mission churches have seceded in order to assert their right to freedom from larger ecclesiastical control, and in which others have founded new movements and organizations independent of direct or indirect control from the Western world. (1968:49)

After discounting terms such as "prophet churches," "native churches," "indigenous churches," and "separatist churches," Turner also concludes that the most appropriate and only alternative should be "independent churches" (1979b:91). Admitting that the term "independent" is not the most precise, Turner argues that it "is devoid of offence and free from the confusions and the more patent inaccuracies associated with the other terms..." (1979b:91). Turner defines this phenomenon as "[a] Church which has been founded in Africa, by Africans,

and primarily for Africans" (Turner 1967d:xvi). This definition encapsulates the essential features of the churches in the movement—that they are of African origin, were founded by Africans, and while not exclusivist, they are essentially adapted to meet the needs, worldview, and lifestyle of African people.

Daneel, who has done extensive research and written much on the Shona Zion Churches in Zimbabwe, also believes that the most appropriate term for these churches is "independent." He claims, "'independent' is an apposite adjective, since in their organization and worship these groups are in fact independent of the Western mission churches that had initially imported the Christian message" (1987:31). Daneel further describes this new phenomenon from a sociological perspective:

> An Independent Church is a new movement arising from the interaction between a tribal community and its religion on one hand, and a heterogeneous foreign culture intruding with its (Christian) religion on the other. In several respects the new movement deviates significantly from the classical religious traditions of both the cultures involved. Elements of both traditions are renewed, modified and embodied in a new religious system. (Daneel 1987:32)

I will later show from my field research to what extent the amaNazaretha Church of Isaiah Shembe fits Daneel's taxonomy.

Another researcher and scholar of African Christianity who has incisively grasped the essence of these churches is Andrew Walls. He reworks Turner's definition of the African Independent Churches, calling them

> [a] historically new development arising in the inter-action between a tribal society and its religion on one hand, and an invader culture and its religion

> on the other, involving a substantial departure from both and a reworking of rejected traditions into something new. (1996:113)[4]

Walls argues that AICs are the expression of African Christianity that "may likely be a new religious movement reworking the old and the new…the distinction between independent and older churches may be of decreasing value" (1996:113).

In spite of the preference and arguments adduced for the use of the term independent by scholars of repute, in this study the acronym AIC will mean "African Initiated Churches," a designation that has become accepted to adherents of these churches. John Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu II, writing on the eve of the World Council of Churches' 50th anniversary conference held in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1998, argued that while Turner's definition had its merits, the term "African Initiatives in Christianity" best describes the movement today (1998:4).[5] Pobee states that

> [w]hile it is true that in earlier times the mission churches were colonial churches, today they are nearly all independent, even if they retain aspects of their origins. What is unique about AICs is their character as *African* Initiatives and, therefore, in accordance with the African genius and culture and ethos. (1998:4)

Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that the discussion on what designation best reflects the whole ethos of the AICs is still debated both by African and Western writers.

Typology

In many ways, Bengt Sundkler's work, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*

(1948), was the catalyst for the avid interest in the AICs by scholars within the academy. Not least among them were Africans. The question of the best descriptive nomenclature of the AICs was debated then as it is in our day. There is consensus among missiologists such as Bengt Sundkler, David Barrett, Inus Daneel, and Harold Turner among others, that there should be a taxonomy that would facilitate identification and study of the AICs.[6] Turner's typology is still considered the most definitive and widely used to this day. The diagrammatic chart below depicts the three most common species of New Religious Movements in sub-Saharan Africa together with their subgroups.[7]

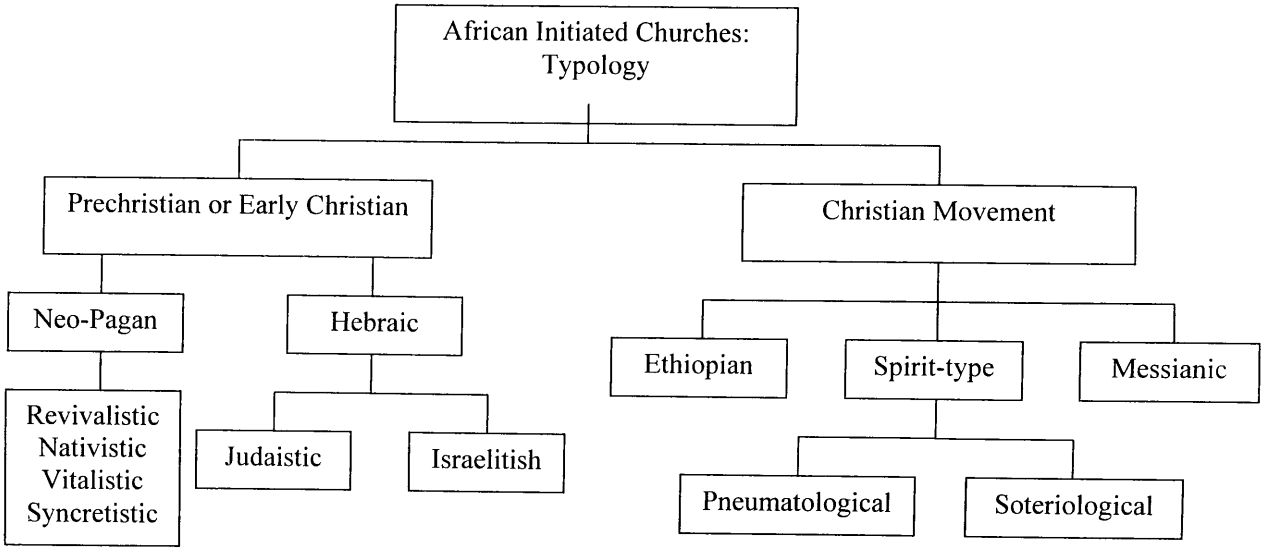

Figure 8. African Initiated Churches: A Typology

These scholars believe that there are two distinct groups within the movement: movements that are considered Pre-Christian or Early Christian and those that are Christian Movements.

The former may be subdivided into two further groups: Neo-pagan movements and Hebraic movements. The first group represents those who have overreacted to Western influences which they believe impinged on their socio-cultural practices. Consequently these movements have attempted to revive and reshape the ancient cults. These neo-pagan movements are described as *revivalist, nativistic, vitalistic,* and *syncretistic*.[8] The Hebraic movements differ somewhat from the neo-pagan in that they are not considered pagan in any sense.[9] However, in moving away from paganism they have built their faith in one God around the Old Testament, thus falling far short of a Christian position (Turner 1967c:8).

These Neo-pagan and Hebraic movements are further characterized by their legalism in the areas of morality, ritualism, and exclusivism. Antagonism toward the white race is not uncommon, and there is a tendency to venerate the so-called Black Messiah as their messianic hope, at the expense of traditional Christian belief in the position of Christ.

While it is true that the Hebraic movements as a whole use some parts of the Christian Bible, none of these groups could be considered fully Christian. This distinction is helpful in that it allows one to distinguish between those within the African Initiated Churches that are classified as Christian and those

who are not Christians, or perhaps show tendencies moving away from Christianity to neo-paganism.

The Christian movements within the African Initiated Churches may be divided into three broad categories: *Ethiopian, Spirit* and *Messianic* –type Churches (Daneel 1987:38-42). The first type, the Ethiopian Churches, derive their name from two Biblical passages. The first text is Psalms 68:31, "Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands to God." This passage is interpreted as a promise that the oppressed African people have a resonating hope that they will rise and find their place in God's plan of salvation (Daneel 1987:38). This idea was borne out, for example, in a sermon preached by James Johnston,[10] when he said, "Africa is to rise once more, Ethiopia is to stretch out her hand to God; her tears are to be wiped off her eyes; her candlestick is to be replaced" (quoted in Hastings 1994:479). The other text concerns the Ethiopian chamberlain in Acts 8:26-40, which shows, it is believed, that the gospel message reached Ethiopia in advance of any European mission. Rising out of this understanding, these movements formulated their own socio-political and religious ideology. They are non-prophetic; they do not place much emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit; and Jordan baptism does not feature as part of their ordinances or liturgy (Daneel 1987:38). Turner further nuances this group in terms of their polity that, "they imitate the forms of church organization as reflected in the West, and in doctrine and worship they are orthodox" (1979b:96).

The second group type, the Spirit-type churches, place special emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, where the outworkings are discerned in glossolalia, prophetic activity, and faith healing. In Zimbabwe these groups call themselves "maKereke dzoMweya," meaning "Churches of the Spirit" (Daneel 1987:39). Daneel is more at home with this designation as it accurately portrays these churches. Sundkler, however, prefers the name Zion, since almost all of these churches, at least in South Africa, have the word Zion in their name (Sundkler 1976:15).

Turner suggested two further subdivisions within the Spirit-type churches He nuanced the activity of the Spirit into pneumatological and soteriological sub-types. In the former, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to reveal the will of God to the individual, leading, guiding, and equipping people with powers for prophecy, prayer, and healing (1979b:98). It is the Spirit that empowers the prophet with divine utterances that are meant to regulate both individual and corporate life in the Church. The prophetic ministry is not confined to one individual, however. Others may share in this activity as they are directed and led by the Spirit (1979b:98).

In the soteriological sub-type, these churches, having rejected former pagan practices, have turned to the Christian God for healing, protection from evil forces, and salvation. Since salvation is construed as deliverance from all of the above, there seems to be no clear definition of salvation from sin or guilt, and

consequently the atonement of Christ seems to be mitigated (Turner 1967c:25). Christ, however, is seen as mediator beyond the therapeutic sense.[11]

The whole ethos of these soteriological churches has much in common with the Pentecostal and Holiness churches. There is some affinity with regards to their moral codes, such as the abstaining from alcohol and tobacco, the necessity of tithing according to the injunction in Malachi in the Old Testament, fasting, and scheduled times for prayer.[12] They have incorporated Western liturgical forms in their worship, and there is evidence of "cultural syncretism," where dancing, the use of drums, and clapping seem to be elicited from the remnants of their past.

In addition to these two group types, there is a third distinct group, the messianic churches. They share similar patterns and emphases with the Spirit-type churches, both the pneumatological and the soteriological. There is one major difference, however, their veneration of a leader who is accorded some kind of messianic status (Turner 1967c:31). The Mindolo consultation in 1962 described as messianic those groups "which, centered around a dominant personality, claim for him special powers involving a form of identification with Christ. It should be noted that when this happens the group has...moved outside the sphere of the Christian Church" (WCC 1962, quoted in Turner (1967c:31). In these movements such a leader, by his mystical powers, miracles, and the mediatorial role he plays between God and his followers assumes the place of Christ (Turner 1967c:31). To what degree this

phenomenon takes place varies from church to church. Daneel points out that "in extreme cases where the Christology is manifestly usurped by the Black Messiah, who is to some extent deified, we are in effect confronted with Black Messianism which can be typified only as non-Christian or post-Christian" (1987:41).

All that remains to be said at this point is that although typologies are good efforts to describe the context of the African Initiated Churches, they remain Western constructs attempting to understand these churches. Understandably, the goal of a typology is to differentiate the essential features of these church groups. Within that framework, we recognize that all conclusions are somewhat tentative. Nevertheless, the typology applied to the African Initiated Churches affords us the opportunity to embark on a more informed inquiry of where we may place the churches in this study. It also allows us to chart the rise and growth of the African Initiated movement and its proliferation into many streams and variations.

History

In recent times, the African Initiated Churches in South Africa have come to be viewed by some as the most dynamic church movement in the country. They have attracted Black South Africans, traditional religionists, and members of mainline churches (or churches that trace their origins to Western churches and missions.) Oosthuizen states that

> In 1959, fully 75 to 80 percent of all Black South African Christians were members of the mainline churches; only 12 to 14 percent were members of the AICs. By 1980, the mainline share of Black Christian population had dropped to 52 percent, while the AICs had increased to 27 percent; by 1991, the figures were 41 percent and 36 percent. (1997b:8)

He goes on to predict that by the next century most black South Africans will be members of the African Initiated Churches if present trends continue (1997b:8).

Historically, the roots of the dynamic movement that has come to be known as the AICs go back into the eighteenth century, specifically to a virtually unknown woman, Kimpa Vita, renamed Beatrice after her baptism in 1700 (Daneel 1987:46). Living in the Portuguese Congo (today, Angola), Donna Beatrice claimed that the spirit of St. Anthony had taken possession of her (Hastings 1994:104-108). Consequently, she dispossessed herself of all material and temporal things and began preaching. According to Jenkins, "An individual is enthusiastically converted through one of the mission churches, from which he or, commonly, she, is gradually estranged. The division might arise over issues of church practice, usually the integration of native practices" (2002:48). Beatrice raised her voice against the Catholic Church and vocalized her displeasure at its formalism and externalism. She canvassed for the removal and destruction of crosses, crucifixes, and images of Christ (Isichei 1995:66), not unlike what happened in the iconoclastic controversies that began in the eighth century and continued sporadically up until the time of Luther (Walker 1970:48-148). To her mind the images could easily become new fetishes replacing the old (Daneel 1987:46).

She is, however, more remembered for her messages of liberation (Uzukwu 1996:28) [13] and hope in a Black Christ who came to earth as an African in Sao Salvador, and who had Black apostles (Hastings 1994:105). The Christ of the white Portuguese exploiters, she argued, could not be the Christ of the Bible. It is here that one witnesses the early rise of Black Theology. She was later venerated as a saint. Yet when she later proclaimed a restoration of the ancient Kongo Empire and a new king, she was arrested and imprisoned and condemned to be burnt at the stake (Hastings 1994:107). It is said that she died with the name of Jesus on her lips.

The latter part of the nineteenth century was to witness a gathering momentum of the Initiated movement in South Africa and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa (Daneel 1987:46-47).

The Ethiopian-type Churches

A precursor to the first Ethiopian churches in South Africa was the organization of the first tribal church in 1884 by Nehemiah Xoxo Tile.[14] Up to that time he was an ordained minister of the Wesleyan Mission Church (Mbuyisazwe Tshabala 1983:50).[15] Tile's breach with the Wesleyan Methodist Church came about because of his involvement in Thembu politics, which earned the ire and disapproval of his Wesleyan superiors (Balia 1991:54).[16] Yet European control and supremacy were not the only reasons that precipitated Tile's secession from the Wesleyan Church. It was "a positive desire to adapt

the message of the church to the heritage of the Tembu tribe. As the Queen of England was the head of the English Church, so the Paramount Chief of the Tembu should be the *summus episcopus* of the new religious organization" (Sundkler 1961[1948] :38).[17] Tile continued to strive for political freedom and social justice for his people, and in the process he was arrested and jailed.

Tile's contribution to the church and African society cannot be overestimated. His efforts gave rise to the Tembu political protest movement and its concerted efforts to restore initiated rule. Balia says,

> The Tembu church should be seen in the context of the long history of African reaction to white penetration. In the past, increasing White pressure had led Africans on the Eastern frontier to offer resistance by appealing to the shades or ancestral spirits. The founding of the Tembu church marked the trial of a new method, the use of a Christian framework within which to express African equality in an age of White control. (Balia 1991:55)

Christianity was seen as the means of articulating people's fears and hopes in a conspicuously racial and hostile environment. Yet the paradox was that the very church that raised their hopes for a humane society was very much a part of the root cause of their problems—loss of human dignity, quality of life, and even their land. These brought into question the very presence of the Methodist Church on their land.

While Nehemiah Tile who was responsible for founding the first African Initiated Church in South Africa, which led to a wave of secessions and in a sense liberation from colonial and missionary subjugation, it was Mangena Mokone who founded the first Ethiopian Church (Hastings 1994:479). He was

ordained as a Methodist preacher in 1888, together with his colleague Daniel Msimang. In spite of being acclaimed a great asset to the Methodist Church and having proved successful in ministry, Mokone soon became aware of the gross discrimination practiced in the Methodist Church system, where he saw a clear distinction between White and Black in the church. Mokone was rudely awakened to the fact that "the African missionary was obliged to submit to the European missionary on all points at issue. He found that the privileges White ministers received were denied to his Black brother ministers" (Balia 1991:70).[18] The African preacher could no longer sit with his White brethren in the same gathering; the natives had to convene their own Black conference and report the proceedings for approval or rejection; and the native preacher was not allowed to enter by the front door of the White preacher—the back door was good enough for him (1991:70).

Thus, in 1892 Mokone founded the Ethiopian Church in the Witwatersrand (Pretoria, South Africa). Mokone was indeed motivated by the text in Psalm 68:31: "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hand unto God" and other references such as Acts 8:27, envisioning a grand plan to send missionaries through Africa (Hastings 1994:479).

A contemporary of Mokone was James M. Dwane, an ordained Wesleyan minister and a gifted speaker. He was sent to England in 1894-1895 to solicit financial support for young students desiring to study for the ministry. Upon his return to South Africa, a disagreement ensued over the disbursement

of the money received in England; this dispute led to Dwane's resignation from the Mission Church. He found an open door for ministry with Mokone in1896 (Sundkler 1961:39-40).

Mokone, via his sister, came to learn about the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) in the United States and corresponded with them with a view to seeking advice on ecclesiastical matters and a source of support for educating local Blacks in the United States. The Ethiopian Church received a favorable response to their request, and the AMEC saw this response as an opportunity to make their presence felt in South Africa (Sundkler 1961:40).[19]

Dwane was sent to consolidate a union between the two churches. He was appointed as superintendent of the work in South Africa, but this appointment was met with much resistance as many thought that Mokone was the rightful leader of the organization. Further, they had not authorized him to receive an "office" from the AMEC (Sundkler 1961:40).

On returning to South Africa, Dwane was successful in persuading other initiated churches to follow him into the AMEC. To this end, he sought government recognition for the church and asked Cecil John Rhodes for the right to expand the church into the neighboring countries of Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, and the Zambezi, now Zambia. This expansion caused some upheaval amongst other mission societies such as the Congregationalists and Presbyterians (1961:40-41).

In 1898 the AMEC sent Bishop Henry Turner to South Africa where he held two conferences and ordained a number of ministers. At this time Dwane was also formally ordained and appointed assistant bishop. It should be noted that this new arrangement with the AMEC was indeed ironic as the very reason, even if not the principal one, for seceding from the Methodist Church was to be autonomous and independent. This new-found marriage, if anything, defeated their original intent (1961:41).

Dwane soon became dissatisfied with the AMEC when he realized that "the Ethiopian program, 'Africa for Africans,' conflicted with the linking up of his church with an American Negro Mission Church" (1961:41).[20] In 1900 he and a large number of followers joined the Anglican Church as the Order of Ethiopia.[21] However, the majority of Ethiopians did not go with Dwane but remained in the AMEC (Sundkler 1961:41-42).[22]

The Zion Christian Church (ZCC)

The Zion Christian Church, with its current membership of over seven million members, is now the largest of the African Initiated Churches in South Africa (Barrett 2001:681). The ZCC in its origins, development, structures, and theology is not only an icon of the independent movement, but it is representative of many other African Initiated Churches in Africa.

There seems to be a lack of consensus regarding the actual dating for the genesis of the movement, but research shows that P. L. Le Roux, a Dutch

Reformed Minister, figured prominently in the rise of the Zionist movement in South Africa (Hennie Pretorius and Lizo Jafta 1997:217). Dissatisfied with the Dutch Reformed Church and its mission policy, Le Roux resigned from the Dutch Reformed Church in 1901 (Sundkler 1976:23). It was at this time that Le Roux encountered a Zion Church minister, Johannes Buchler, who himself had seceded from the Congregational Church in 1895 (Sundkler 1976:29).

Buchler came to know of Dr. John Alexander Dowie, from Zion City, Illinois (near Chicago), and subscribed to his journal.[23] Later he visited Dowie in America, and under his influence he started a faith-healing practice. Both Le Roux and Buchler were taken up by the teachings that came out of Dowie's Church and these conflicted with the Dutch Reformed Church. Some of the issues were the use of doctors or medicines, the teaching that the eating of flesh was against the Holy Scriptures and therefore sinful, the use of tobacco being sinful, and infant baptism being against the teaching of Holy Scripture (Sundkler 1976:29-30). However, the main teachings of Dowie, not unlike the early Pentecostals, were divine healing, triune immersion, and the conviction that the Second Coming of Christ was near at hand. Edgar Mahon, a former captain in the Salvation Army, was also influenced by the movement in the same way as Le Roux and Buchler (1976:30). He initiated his own Zion Church (Christian Catholic Church in Zion) as early as 1902, when he was excommunicated from the Salvation Army (Sundkler 1976:33).

Dowie, who never visited South Africa, sent one of his overseers, Daniel Bryant, in 1904 as his emissary to establish the Christian Catholic Church in Zion. In Wakkerstroom, Bryant baptized 150 of Le Roux's Zionist followers in the Snangrivier (Snake River), and in Harrismith 60 of Mohan's followers were baptized in the Caledonia River. Those events heralded the beginning of the Zionist movement in South Africa. Bryant returned to America in 1908 (1976:36-41).

Le Roux and other African leaders continued to further the cause for the Zionist movement, and through his influence the organization acquired a marked Pentecostal slant. Le Roux himself claimed to be baptized in the Holy Spirit in 1908 (1976:52). It was not until 1915, however, that Le Roux left the Zion movement to concentrate his work with the Pentecostals. By this time, the sparks of Pentecostalism from the Azusa Street Revival had caught fire in South Africa. Archibold H. Cooper, who was to play a leading role in the Full Gospel movement in South Africa, received the first *Apostolic Papers* published by the *Azusa* movement in Los Angeles (1976:52).

Although Africans of the Zion movement also claimed the experience and testified to receiving "their Pentecost" (Daneel 1987:54), they refused to be absorbed into the Pentecostal movement, as Le Roux had been. As a result and with this new phase of spiritual fervor, they held fast to the name Zion. Thus the Zion Apostolic Church was formed, and Elias Mahlange became its new

leader (Sundkler 1961:48). After the departure of Le Roux, many new Zion churches were founded.

The main secessions within the movement took place sometime between 1917-1920. Paulo Mabilitsa, the most educated among the African leaders at that time, called his church the Christian Apostolic Church in Zion (Sundkler 1976:59). Daniel Nkonyane, a Zulu, started the Christian Catholic Apostolic Holy Spirit Church of Zion, and upon his death his son Stephen Nkonyane became its leader (Sundkler 1976:56-59). J. G. Philips, a Nyasa, founded the Holy Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion and his leadership was succeeded by M.G. Koza. Fred Luthuli became prominent in the Seventh-day Adventist secession movement that also reflected Zion characteristics (Sundkler 1976:56-66).[24]

Further splits were to occur within the Zionist churches. One session that was to eventually give rise to the Zion Christian Church was the founding of the Zion Apostolic Faith Mission (ZAFM)—a secession from Mhlangu's Zion Apostolic Church (Daneel 1987:55). Subsequently, in 1925 Mutendi in Rhodesia and Lekganyane in Transvaal, South Africa, broke away from the ZAFM, establishing the Zion Christian Church in their respective countries (1987:55).

The Founder of the Zion Christian Church in South Africa was Engenase (Ignatius) Barnabas Lekganyane (1885-1948). He was originally a member of the Free Scottish Presbyterian Church until 1911. In 1912 he was baptized into

the Zionist movement. For a while he was a member of the Zion Apostolic Faith Mission in Lesotho under Edward Motaung and later became a minister in that church (Anderson 2000:69). About this time, it is told, Lekganyane went to a mountain near his home to pray. There he had a revelation that "a multitude of people would follow him" and that he would lead a large congregation. In 1917 he prophesied that Britain would defeat Germany, and when this event came to pass his prestige as "a man of God" increased (Anderson 2000:69). In 1925 he returned to Thabakgone (Transvaal, South Africa) and founded the Zion Christian Church (Anderson 2001:97). In 1930 he purchased a farm at Boyne, about 50 kilometers from Pretoria and established his headquarters there (2001:101-102).

The Zion Christian Church proliferated rapidly and soon had members in the major urban areas such as Pretoria, Johannesburg, Vereeniging, Germiston and Kimberley. With fewer than a thousand members in 1925, by 1942 there were more than 27,000. What began as a small Northern Sotho tribal church soon overflowed tribal boundaries and became established among Tsonga, Venda, Tswana, Sotho, and even Zulu people in the cities and homelands (Anderson 2000:70).

Numerous miraculous deeds marked Lekganyane's ministry. Reports of healings of cripples, healings of barren wombs, people finding employment after he had prayed for them, blessing of harvests, and rain making brought

people to believe that "God had given all power to His chosen prophet, Engenas" (Anderson 2000:71).

On 1 June 1948 Engenas Lekganyane died, and a leadership struggle arose among his sons. His eldest son, Jesus, had died, and the second, Barnabas, died after serving only seven months as leader. The struggle for leadership then was between his two remaining sons, Edward and Joseph. Joseph and his followers settled on the family farm, but Edward and his supporters established their own headquarters at Zion City, Moria. Edward soon united most of his father's followers, gaining support especially from the urban populations (Anderson 2000:71). In 1954 there were more than 80000 members and by the time of his death in 1967, the membership rose above the 200,000 mark (2000:71).

Upon Edward Lekganyane's death, his son Barnabas, only thirteen, was appointed leader and bishop of the movement at their Easter Assembly in 1968. In 1975 after he had come of age, he was formally inducted as bishop of the Zion Christian Church (Anderson 2000:72).

Beliefs and Practices of the ZCC

Zion City Moria is the headquarters of the ZCC. What Jerusalem and the Wailing Wall is to the Jew, the holy site in Mecca is to the Muslims, and the river Ganges is to the Hindu, Moria is to the ZCC. The name Moria reflects 2 Chronicles 3:1, and other texts that locate the Temple in Jerusalem. The

reference in Hebrews 12:22-23 is also pertinent as it speaks of "Mount Zion and the City of God, the heavenly Jerusalem and the assembly of the first-born."

For the worshippers Zion City Moria is indeed experienced as a "new Jerusalem." It symbolizes refuge, protection, and healing and cleansing. All people who enter Moria are sprinkled with water to purify them (Anderson 2001:100-101). The presence and power of the prophet is experienced by the sensitive pilgrim; the prophet represents his followers before God and one feels closer to God at Moria (Oosthuizen 1968b:37).

Healing ceremonies are an integral part of the religious gathering for AICs. According to Jim Kiernan, "the mainstay of Zionist healing power is their control of spirit (*umoya*) which is identified with the Holy Spirit of Christian belief" (1990:105). There exists a vast array of media through which power or *umoya* is attained for the Zionist. Water is one of the main agents for acquiring power. Members are invited to use it as a medicament, either by drinking it or washing in it. Baptism by immersion in the currents of a swift flowing river or in the ocean is conducted for the purpose of cleansing; this baptism is also seen as a means of securing power (*umoya*) for the individual. The stronger the current, the more power one receives (Kiernan 1990a:106).

The regalia worn by Zion adherents also have spiritual significance. The white garments with colored sashes and braided cords are believed to be blessed with spiritual power. They are worn to ward off illness, disease, and evil attacks (Kiernan 1990a:112). It is the function of the prophet at public healing

ceremonies to recommend to the afflicted member the use of the regalia for a period of time until the illness is cured (Kiernan 1990a:112).

While water and the regalia are important agents for the wellbeing of ZCC members, the traditional staff also forms part of the basic protective equipment for individuals. Whereas Zulus once used spears when fighting, they now use sticks for protection. For the Zionist, however, the staff is never employed for combat but is used solely to aid in healing and driving out evil spirits: "It is through the acquisition of the staff that each Zionist gains access to this rich diversity of spiritual powers" (Kiernan 1990a:118).

At worship services ministers in the ZCCs effect healing through the laying on of hands in accordance with the biblical mandate in Mark 16:17-18 and Matthew 10:7-8. In his unpublished work, *The Zion Christian Church: A Christian Church with African Characteristics, or an African Church with Christian Characteristics?* (n.d.), Theodor G. Jackel discovered that there was a time when ministers and evangelists in the ZCC laid hands on the sick, and when members recovered from reported illness the ministers claimed power equal to that possessed by the Bishop Ignatius. The church subsequently issued a communiqué stating that God had vested all power in his chosen prophet Ignatius. Thus, ministers and evangelists were not permitted to use their hands when praying for the sick. Rather, they were provided with a piece of khaki cloth blessed by the prophet. The cloth was said to mediate powers of healing from the prophet to the patient (Jackel n.d.:34). The founder of the church,

Engenas, was also accorded similar status in the eyes of the members of the ZCC: "Members believed that he was a representative of God in the form of a prophet. God had given all the powers to him, and to despise him was to despise God in person. He was mediator not in the theological sense but in a traditional sense" (Lukhaimane 1991:233).[25] Lukhaimane does not elaborate in what sense Engenas functioned as a traditional mediator but not as mediator in a theological sense. This concept raises the question for this dissertation, in the context of the amaNazaretha Church, whether the current leader Vimbeni Shembe functions in a similar role for his people.

The above examples clearly demonstrate that Zionists, while endeavoring to be faithful to the Christian message, do not dismiss traditional healing means and paraphernalia to achieve that end. Thus Kiernan adds, "In effect, Zionism harnesses the distilled spiritual energy of Christianity to respond to modern African needs and channels it through African thought and action, though without denuding it entirely of Christian categories" (1995:122). Eugene Nida believes that the ZCC exemplify an indigenized Christianity at least in terms of healing. He says,

> The Zionist Movements are those typified by emphasis on healing by native medicines, the use of old styled diviners, the local prophet, and the detection of witches by elaborate ordeals. These Zionist groups emphasize the past and appeal to the rural people. (1960:139-140)

It is the burden of this study to later show whether the amaNazaretha Church is truly an indigenized expression of the Christian gospel or whether their beliefs

and practices have moved them beyond an orthodox Christian position. A brief study of the ZCC's theology will later allow us to compare and contrast their theology with that of the amaNazaretha Church.

Zion Christian Church: Theology

Any discussion of African theology should presuppose one's affinity, to some extent, with the African worldview. This reality was again brought to the fore at the Mindolo consultation on the African Initiated Church movement in 1962.[26] The consultation admonished that the first requisite should be a sympathetic and careful understanding of the issues that divide Western thinking from that of the African. Concerning the African worldview, the consultation said,

> Although in humility we confess that African world-views present intellectual difficulties for some of us, we would emphasize that they need to be taken seriously in Christian practice. The successful cure by traditional diviners of some patients who have been inaccessible to the techniques of Western medicine, suggests that in African culture it is necessary for therapists to enter sympathetically into their patients' beliefs in the objective character of such ultra-human forces as ghosts and witchcraft. This conflicts with the scientific mood, which has excluded all psychic character from the external world. Yet belief in spirit-possession is an ineradicable part of the New Testament thought-forms; it is indeed doubtful whether it is possible to understand some of the experiences therein recorded unless we can enter into the interpretation which the New Testament itself offers. To deny this interpretation is rationalist, rather than Christian; and it is no part of the Christian Gospel to impart a particular metaphysic, but to speak to each man where he is. (Hayward 1963:167)

As the above quote suggests, any attempt at a theological evaluation of the different trends within the AICs is by no means an easy task. The

proliferation of these churches in their large numbers, the various cultural differences and languages, and the extent to which they transform their African traditional religious beliefs into Christianity create considerable problems for the researcher. The biggest hurdle is that so many come to this task relying on the empirical research of others. Hence, the task of missiology today remains to secure more empirical, on-site research over a period of time that would afford a better understanding of where the Africans stand in their understanding of the Christian faith as over against their traditional religions.

Christology: biblical Christ or black messiah? The emphasis or lack thereof, on the person and work of Christ by the AICs seems to have been an important criterion in arriving at a decision about whether the AIC churches are actually Christian churches. Investigators such as Sundkler and Turner, who carried out extensive field work in South Africa and Nigeria respectively, evaluated them very positively without regard to some questionable tendencies. One investigator, Oosthuizen (1968b), places some of them as post-Christian.[27] According to Daneel, Oosthuizen characterizes all prophetic churches—that is, the Zionist and Apostolic groups—and messianic movements as nativistic, as opposed to what he calls Christian sects (Daneel 1987:246). Peter Beyerhaus provides one set of criteria to accurately evaluate Oosthuizen's claims and the Christology resident in these churches. His criteria for an orthodox Christology are as follows:

1. Christ must be proclaimed as *Christus Victor*, the one who triumphs over evil forces (Colossians 2:15);
2. Christ must be proclaimed as the *Crucified One* who took the curse of our sins upon himself;
3. Christ must be proclaimed as the One who is *present*, still working powerfully among his people and assisting them in their need, danger and temptation; and
4. He must be proclaimed as the one *to come* who will appear at the full revelation of God's kingdom. (quoted in Daneel 1987: 256) [28]

Beyerhaus's third criterion perhaps is most helpful as it relates to the existential everyday lives of Africans. More than just articulating their beliefs, Africans demonstrate them in and through their practices in daily life. For example, in the face of calamities, illness, and loss of property, to whom do AIC adherents turn?

Ernst Damman in his study of the African Initiated Churches concluded that Christ played no role in either the beliefs or practices of these churches. He offers a scale of closeness to orthodox belief as follows:

1. A view of Christ which basically agrees with that of the historical church from which the movement was born (e.g. the African Methodist Episcopal Church);
2. Although Christ is given a place in creedal pronouncements, in the realities of religious experience he is a background figure (e.g. the Musama Disco Christo Church in Ghana);
3. Christ is wholly superceded even in creedal pronouncements (e.g. the Nazareth Baptist Church of Shembe); and
4. Messianic attributes of Christ are transferred to the group leader- the Black Messiah is totally identified with the biblical Messiah (e.g. Simon Kimbangu). (Quoted in Daneel 1987: 257)[29]

It would appear that the theology of the AICs has received a more sympathetic evaluation from Sundkler (1961; 1976) than it has from Damman. At this point I simply note Damman's conclusions. I will discuss my findings

from my field research in Chapters 5 and 6 and offer my conclusions on the theology and Christology of the amaNazaretha Church in Chapter 7. Comparison between these two approaches in evaluating the Christological understanding in the AICs indicates the problem of subjectivity and the bias of the researchers. Here, the Mindolo conference set the tone for any value judgment by issuing the following statement regarding the role of the prophet usurping the place of Christ. The conference stated, "It should be noted that when this identification becomes substitution, in our opinion the group has moved outside the sphere of the Christian Church" (Hayward 1963:167).

In our earlier discussion on typology, we encountered the Messianic type of churches where there appeared to be a kind of veneration to the point at which the Black Messiah may usurp the position of Christ. In attempting to differentiate between Zionism and Messianism, Sundkler reduced the distinction to one fundamental question: "Who stands at the gates of heaven—the Jesus of Scripture or some Bantu Messiah in the person of Shembe, Lekhanyane, Khambule or Masowe?" (1961:323). While the Zionist would settle for Christ as Savior, the messianic movements would opt for a Black Christ. Sundkler goes on to describe Shembe as a mediator, one who holds the key to heaven (1961:290), thus excluding the movement from Christianity. Other observers refer to the role of the Black Messiah as the controller of the keys to the gates of heaven, who will admit only his followers to Paradise. Others see Shembe and Lekhanyane as kings in their colonies, mediators in their own new Jerusalem. At this point, Jesus Christ

as head of the church fades into the background (Oosthuizen 1968b:91). In Oosthuizen's discussion of Christology in the AICs (1968b:79-106), he asserts that there is a further devaluing of the person and work of Christ, which are denied by an overt emphasis on the leader's personal powers (1968b:103). The emphasis is also on magic, and magic is a means of enhancing one's power and status. This belief makes it possible to control and monopolize Christ's authority (1968b:89).

Early writers and observers of the AIC movements who previously spoke of Black Messianism, after more extensive empirical research arrived at different conclusions. Sundkler, for example, in his later work *Zulu Zion and Some Swazi Zionists* (1976), comes to the following conclusion about Shembe and Khambulu, both of whom he had previously classified as Messiah figures:

> [T]here is no conscious attempt to minimize the revelation of Jesus. Sermons and testimonies underline that Jesus is the Ultimate Authority and Final Judge. But...the Zulu Servant of God has revealed himself in the life of his people, as Healer and Helper and thus of an extraordinary quality. (1976:310)

Daneel, who conducted interviews with Shona Zionists in Zimbabwe, admits that Christ's mediatorship is sometimes misconstrued in Shona Churches, or at least that it may function to a lesser degree "in the religious experience of some individuals" (1987:189). It cannot be doubted that both Lekhanyane or Mutendi were in some sense "mediators" to some people, because of their mystical powers through which they were able to advance the good of their people—for example, faith-healing in their churches. Members saw the prophet as an "emissary, the 'man of God' who listened to their

problems and was expected to convey them to God in heaven" (1987:189). It is this role of the prophet which can cause misunderstanding and confusion, as is the case with one deacon who said,

> Mutendi is the one who speaks directly to Mwari. We do not address Mwari Wokudenga [the God of Heaven] directly, but we speak to the God of Lekhanyane and Mutendi. Minor problems are resolved by us, the office-bearers, without referring to God. The big problems we bring here to Moriah and our leader then presents them to God. We cannot ourselves raise matters to heaven. (Daneel 1987:189)

This deacon has no illusions concerning the mediatorial role of either Mutendi or Lekhanyane. The remote God can only be accessible via these two prophets. This view, however, is not representative of all Zionists. The following view, a sample of several interviews of both clergy and members, reveals the complexities:

> Mutendi is *like* Jesus but cannot take his place. Mutendi is our 'foreman', but Jesus is above him. To us Mutendi is like the Pope is to the Catholics and the Revd. Louw (pioneer missionary to Mashonaland) to the DR [Dutch Reformed] Church. He is subordinate to Jesus but in him we see the likeness of Jesus. We venerate Mutendi because he is *like* Jesus, but he himself warns us *not* to compare him to Christ. (Daneel 1987:191)

Daneel admits "there are no biblical grounds for the leader's function at the gates of heaven" (1987:191), and the kind of mediatorship espoused by some members is unbiblical. Daneel is clearly more sympathetic to the African view and thus does not see the function of the leader "at the heavenly gates" as an attempt to usurp or supercede the position of Christ. The distinction is that the role of the leader is that of an intermediary and does not imply in any way

automatic access to heaven for his followers. The problem arises when the intermediary is elevated to the status above Christ. Then, one begins to question their beliefs regarding Christology. Whether this phenomenon in fact occurs in the hearts and minds of the church members may only be verified through field research and interviews.

Anderson in his recent research (2000) among the Soshanguve Zionists in South Africa showed that Christ is central in its beliefs and practices. Anderson says, "[I]n every part of the interviews and in every area of life all Pentecostals and Zionist members spoke about the overarching importance of faith in God and in Jesus Christ" (2000:222). He did, however, admit that

> the emphasis is often on the presence of the Holy Spirit, through Spirit baptism, healing, prophecy, speaking in tongues, exorcism and other Spirit manifestations. It may not be far off the mark to suggest that theology and Christology are dominated by pneumatology in some of these churches. This does not suggest, however, that there is no clear theology or Christology in these churches or that pneumatology is exclusively overemphasized. (Anderson 2000:222)

Anderson, in defense of the ZCCs' belief in the centrality of Christ, shares some interview data to support his claims. He writes, "Several Zionist church members interviewed shared their faith in Jesus Christ as the basis for their Christian lives. "Jesus is the one who saves us," declared one ZCC member. "He was sent by God to save people from their sins" (2000:224). Anderson cites the official magazine of the ZCC, the *ZCC Messenger*, which stated in an article, "The Zion Christian Church is a society of Christians who believe that Jesus Christ is the Savoir and Son of God and that he died on the

cross for our sins" (2000:225). Anderson argues on the basis of his interviews that there is evidence of a high Christology in the ZCC.

Regarding the question of messianic tendencies attributed to the leader, Anderson quotes a ZCC official who said, "The bishop fulfilled the same functions between God and man that the ancestors had done in traditional religion. He was a messiah, a prophet for his followers" (Anderson 2000:227). Anderson, in mitigation, says that today ZCC members do not emphasize the role of the leader, rather in their church practices and official news magazines Jesus Christ is preeminent.

Regarding the role of ancestors, it would appear that ZCC members still have recourse to approaching the ancestors. To quote Anderson on this issue, "People interviewed...said that ancestors were mediators between people and God. They were God's helpers and they revealed God's will to people. 'When people wish to speak to God they should go through the ancestors,' said one man" (Anderson 2000:175). Anderson concludes,

> Fundamentally, the Supreme Being is unpredictable and unknowable, and sometimes even dangerous. For this reason, people turn to those nearer home, those more easily related to, more easily understandable, those they can argue with, plead their case with, and even scold—the ancestors. (2000:176)

The above comments from ZCC members relating to ancestors reveal that ancestors still play an important role, both in their religious and cultural practices and beliefs. Further, it seems that Jesus Christ's role and function as

one who mediates on our behalf is not an essential or functioning part of the ZCC members' everyday worldview and daily living. Despite what they "said" in their interviews, their daily practices reveal little accommodation for the person and the work of Christ. However, Anderson's fieldwork offers us some helpful insight about what ZCC members today currently believe and practice.[30] Further, Anderson's work is valuable in that it offers us some insight into ZCC beliefs and practices with regard to the position of Christ, the ancestors, and the leader.

Evaluation

To conclude this evaluation specifically of the ZCC, Mazibuko, a South African theologian, stated that although leaders like Edward Lekganyane and others rejected receiving a messianic type of homage, they were not always successful in convincing their followers otherwise. To this day many believe that the leaders are omniscient, possessed of extraordinary powers, and able to perform miraculous healings. In other words, they are construed as mediators between themselves and God (Muzibuko 1989:39-40).

My assessment, along with other writers, though tentative, is that the uniqueness of Christ in the Zion Christian Church is compromised in terms of his mediatorial work. Although the ZCC constitution refers to Jesus as the cornerstone of the church, it does not follow that he has retained this position in the hearts of the people (as found in Mazibuko 1989:42). Further, their overt emphasis upon pneumatology has led to a weakening of their Christology.

Apart from introducing Jesus as the One who had come to tell the people of the last judgment, there seems to be little in-depth teaching about the implications of Christ's life and work both for the individual and the church. As a result the concept of conversion is seen only as an escape from God's judgment. The attainment of church membership in a sense supercedes the implications of conversion in the individual's relationship with Christ. In the light of such ambivalence in their theological understanding, one solution would be more theological training[31] for the ministers, which perhaps would eventually lead to a more orthodox interpretation of Scripture.

Summary

This brief study into the phenomenal rise and growth, beliefs and practices of the African Initiated Churches in South Africa thus far reveals that, first, the history of this movement has its antecedents in the political, socio-cultural milieu of its time. The history of the AICs can only be comprehended in that light. South Africa has had a chequered history. It has endured the scourge of racism, apartheid, and repressive labor policies. All of these forms of prejudice began in 1652 with the arrival of the first Dutch settlers (Pillay and Hofmeyer 1991:232). Today the result is that poverty and degradation coexist in a country where income distribution was racially distorted and where lavish wealth and abject poverty characterized this society. Following his first visit to South Africa in 1985, James Cone, the progenitor of the Black Theology

movement, said that being in South Africa made him imagine what it would have been like for a black American to be in the South during the 1940s and 1950s with no North. The AICs, among other churches, had their genesis and grew in such a context.

Second, missionaries, true to their convictions and the biblical mandate, came with the gospel and their western baggage. Africa is indebted to the early missionaries who against all odds came with a message of hope.[32] However, many missionaries totally ignored the role which ritual, symbol, and ceremony could fulfill in the lives of Africans. Thus, the "good news of the gospel" became "bad news" for the African. Eugene Nida rightly points out that

> ...[u]nfortunately some of the unique elements of the gospel are not the things we really talk about. We rather teach people that Christianity involves a new set of taboos: You musn't drink; you musn't smoke; you musn't have more than one wife, etc. And so people often have a very strange idea of what this thing Christianity really is all about. (Nida 1971:97)

Third, behind all of the negative causal factors contributing to the rise of the AICs, the genuine missionary fervor and endeavor of certain individuals stand out like beacons on a darkened shore. P. Le Roux, an Afrikaner coming out of the Dutch Reformed Church, is indeed one such example. As seen here, Le Roux holds an important place in South African mission history, a "white Zion" whose initial efforts gave rise to the Zionist movement. Today the ZCC is the largest AIC in South Africa.

Finally, Western-oriented churches that Europeanized, intellectualized, and institutionalized Christianity in South Africa perhaps have a different role to play here, since it is the African indigenous churches that are setting the tone for what Christianity should look like in this new millennium.[33] The Zion Christian Church is certainly a vanguard of an indigenous expression of African Christianity. In spite of the movement's theological problems and other weaknesses, these churches can no longer be regarded as a bridge back to traditional religion. All the signs for expansion and advancement are there (Jenkins 2002:52-53). Nevertheless, we have shown that the form of Christianity displayed by the AICs, though culturally appropriate and indigenized, may perhaps be wanting in terms of Christological understanding. In this regard the work of missiologists has only begun.

As Walls has suggested, one of the most important events in the whole of Church history has occurred in our lifetime; it surely must be that we are witnessing a complete change in the center of gravity of Christianity where Africa is the focus (Walls 1976:180): "Intangible in many of its aspects, the Christian presence has been and remains in the African scene, a massive and unavoidable fact and factor" (Baeta 1968:xii).

In the light of the above study, and as we continue to study the amaNazaretha Church, a fitting admonition for us comes from Max Warren: "Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may

find ourselves treading on men's dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival" (quoted in Race 1983:3).

The study of African and Zulu culture and worldview, their religious beliefs and practices, and the brief excursion in to the rise of the AICs, their history and theology sets the foundation for the study of amaNazaretha Church and its beliefs and practices in Chapter 4.

Notes

[1] A discussion of the various names given to these indigenous groups follows in the chapter.

[2] B. A. Muzibuko (1989:1) claimed in 1989 that there were more than 10,000 such groups in Africa. Philip Jenkins (2002:57) suggests a figure of 35 million adherents in the subcontinent.

[3] Nya Kwiawon Taryor, Sr. from Liberia, West Africa, for one, offers a definition for terms that one would encounter in such a study as this one. He discuss terms such as Independency, Indigenous, Initiated Churches, Separatist, Prophetic Movements, Messianic Churches, and Mission Churches (1984:262-270).

[4] Turner himself defined new religious movements as "a new development arising in the course of the interaction of a tribal or primal society and its religion with one of the more powerful and sophisticated cultures and its major religion, involving some substantial departure from the classical religious traditions of both the cultures concerned by reworking the contributing traditions into a different religious system" (1976:14).

[5] Gabriel Ositelu II, who passed away just prior to the publication of the book, was a member of the WCC and primate of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), Nigeria (AIC).

[6] Sundkler's (1948 [1961]) attempt at formulating a typology resulted in his distinguishing between the "Ethiopian" type and the "Zionist" type of churches in South Africa. Sundkler concentrated his energies mainly on the Zulus in the province of Natal. See Sundkler (1961 [1948]: 53). David Barrett, undertaking a more general study of the AICs in the continent of Africa, surveyed some 850 tribes. After engaging the reader in a discussion on terms such as prophetic, messianic, millennial, nativistic, syncretistic and separatist, Barrett argues for the use of the term "Independency." See Barrett (1968:44-63). Daneel, on the other hand, relies extensively on Turner's typology. See Daneel (1987:34-42).

[7] I have utilized Turner's typology documented in two different sources, namely, "A Typology for African Religious Movements" In *Journal of Religion in Africa. Vol.1 1967:1-34, and Religious Innovations in Africa* (1979b:80-108). Cf. also Daneel (1987:34-42).

[8] Examples of revivalist groups would be those who have made a concerted effort to revive traditional religion via "a combination of tradition, training of priests and the creation of sanctuaries" (Daneel 1987:35). Nativistic groups are represented by those who have become conscientized to their racial identity and nationalistic pride in the face of foreign influences and therefore endeavor to purge all that is foreign. Vitalistic groups have a tendency to use some elements of the Christian faith in their traditional religious

practices. As for the *syncretistic* groups, both pagan and new religious elements coalesce so much so that the Christian elements are unrecognizable, thus rendering them un-Christian. See Daneel (1987:35-36); Turner (1979b:84).

[9] For a fuller discussion on the Hebraic movements, see Harold W Turner (1967c). Turner further delineates the Hebraic movements into two sub groups: Judaistic and Israelitish types (1967c:8-10). The Judaistic strand represents those who place "emphasis upon laws, rituals, and taboos, upon baptisms, and purifications and festivals; a sense of exclusiveness may appear in hostility to the white race and in messianic expectations focused upon a 'Black Messiah' who will see justice done at last to the suffering African people of God; finally direct revelation through prophets may have ceased" (Turner 1967c:9). Turner describes the Israelitish group as "those who reject idolatry and magic, and now feel that the one God of the Scriptures is loving, helpful and speaks to the community through its founder or successor prophets, commanding faith in him (prophet) alone, together with various moral reforms" (Turner 1967c:8).

[10] James Johnson, who was a Nigerian bishop, was one of the dissenting voices arguing for what he called "African Christianity" as there is European and Asian Christianity (Hastings 1996:480).

[11] Both Daneel and Turner develop this theme more exhaustively. I develop this theme more fully in Chapter 7 below. See M. L. Daneel (1974:12-124).

[12] For other features consistent with Pentecostalism, see G. C. Oosthuizen (1968b:119-148). Oosthuizen, however, in the chapter "The Misunderstanding of the Biblical Meaning of the Holy Spirit in the Initiated Movements does not see the person and work of the Holy Spirit as represented in these churches to be consistent with that of Pentecostalism.

[13] Uzukwu (1996) illustrates the close relationship between religious practices in Africa and liberation movements. See also, Chukwudum B. Okolo (1978:68-71).

[14] No definitive history of the rise of the African Initiated Churches in South Africa exists. However, the most comprehensive of all written histories is that of Bengt Sundkler. Most scholars rely on his works more than others. See his 1961[1948] and 1976 works.

[15] Tshabala is a Zulu from South Africa who wrote a Masters Dissertation on the topic: *Shembe's Hymn Book Reconsidered: Its Source and Significance* (1983) at Aberdeen University, Scotland England.

16 Balia details the issues raised by Tile, especially in the light of the political situation in the country at that time. It seems, according to Balia, that the Methodist church frowned on Tile's activities as his activities went against missionary and colonial ideology.

[17] Kiernan speaking in defense of Tile's decision to secede and found the Tembu Church says, "...within a space of ten years tribal churches of this kind had also emerged among the Tswana and the Pedi. This was an assertion of tribal autonomy against missionary rule and, because the chief of the tribal group was made head of the splinter church, it could not be seen as a bid to increase the personal influence of the instigators" (1995:119).

[18] See also Balia's (1991:81) footnote no.8 where he delineates some of the inconsistencies and harsh treatment that the African missionaries encountered at that time.

[19] The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) was founded in Philadelphia, USA, in 1816 by the African American preacher Richard Allen. He had earlier withdrawn from the white Methodist Church in 1787 because of race discrimination (Sundkler 1961:40). The AMEC had started mission work in Liberia in 1820 and boasted of a membership of some 800,000 people. See also Walton Johnson (1979:89ff.).

[20] See also Jim Kiernan (1995:119). Kiernan states that "the Ethiopian Church...arose not only out of resentment of missionary autocracy, but also out of indignation on the part of defecting ministers at the belittlement of their capacity for leadership" (1995:119).

21 Several other secessions occurring at this time are well documented by Daneel (1987:50).

[22] The Ethiopian contact with the AMEC in the USA had in some way afforded Blacks the opportunity to study in America. Many of the Ethiopian leaders had a shorter or longer period of study in the USA. A survey in Natal in 1906-7 revealed that some 150 Africans from South Africa with definite connections with the Ethiopian Church had gone to the USA for study. The Ethiopian movement seems to have been a catalyst for the opening of a Bantu University in South Africa, and thus was the University of Fort Hare born in 1916, with government approval. (See Sundkler 1961:43).

[23] Sundkler cites as his primary source, *Leaves of Healing*, a weekly paper edited by John Alexander Dowie that began to be published in 1889. This paper along with David Bryant diary forms the basis for much of Sundkler's historical data for the genesis of the Zion movement.

[24] Sundkler (1976:48-49), gives this part of Zion history a fuller treatment than in his previous work, *Bantu Prophets* (1961).

[25] At the time of writing, Lukhaimane was Head of the Department of History, University of Venda, South Africa.

[26] The consultation on the AIC movement was organized by the Department of Missionary Studies of the WCC and was sponsored by the All Africa Church Conference at the Mindolo Ecumenical Centre, Kitwe, Northern Rhodesia [Zambia] in 1962.

27 Oosthuizen argues that while many of AICs are Christian in an orthodox sense, others fall short of the standard of Christian orthodoxy, thus rendering them "Post Christian" (1968b:xiv).

[28] Peter Beyerhaus, Professor of Mission Science and Ecumenics at Tubigen University, Germany, is quoted from his work, "Begegnungen mit messianischen Bewegungen in Afrika" in *Zeitschrift feur Theologie und Kirche*, Vol. 64, 1967.

[29] Ernst Damman who is fluent in Swahili, worked mainly in East Africa, is quoted from his German work, "Christusverstaendnis in den nachchristlichen Kirchen und Sekten Afrikas" in E. Benz *Messianische Kirche. Sketen und Bewegungen im heutigen Afrika.* (1965).

[30] It should be noted that Anderson's fieldwork was confined to one localized group of ZCC adherents. Given the proliferation of ZCC churches all around South Africa, rural and urban, perhaps a wider sample would reveal different results.

[31] See Charles Nyamiti (1994:62-77). Nyamiti discusses the role of Christology within the field of theology in the African context and suggests guidelines for engaging in more serious study in this area. See also, Emmanuel Martey (1993:76-81).

[32] See Leon De Kock (1996), especially the chapter "Missionary Heroes and the Miraculous Conversion of Africa", (1996:141-187).

[33] See Simon Moripe (1995:103-107).

Chapter 4

The Religious and Cultural Worldview of the amaNazaretha Church

In Chapter 1 I recounted briefly the history of the amaNazaretha Church and its succession of leaders. Before embarking on a study of the structure, ecclesiology, beliefs, practices, and theology of the amaNazaretha Church, I wish to recall some events in the life and times of the founder, Isaiah Shembe, and his successors. These have an important bearing on how the church views its leaders today—specifically Isaiah Shembe, the founder, and the current incumbent, Vimbeni Shembe.

Antecedents to the Rise of the amaNazaretha Church

While the events surrounding the birth of Isaiah Shembe are well documented in scholarly literature (cf. Roberts 1936; Sundkler 1976; Hexham 1994; Hexham and Oosthuizen 1996, inter alia), amaNazaretha members often refer to certain events in the early life of the prophet Isaiah when they speak of the prophet's deification. To substantiate their claims, members recall stories of a supernatural nature surrounding his birth and early life. In so doing they are engaging in what Walter Kaiser (2000; cf.1981) has termed antecedent theology.

Isaiah Shembe told his congregation how God had prepared him for his ministry in a sermon at Ekuphakameni in 1926:

> In olden times, when Zululand was still ruled by king Senzagakhona (1816A.D.), God visited my forefathers who lived in their homes in the mountains of Babanango, serving King Senzagakhona. Mzazela...when he

> was sleeping in the night, the Word of Jehova[h] came to him: "Mzazela, behold I shall raise a king of violent temper (Shaka)...who will rule the country with violent temper and will spill the blood of many people. I shall build on him my nation, that all Brown people be united in the Zulu kingdom. I advise you to flee together with your children to the upper country in the West, so that the rage of that king may not come down upon you. For from your progeny I shall raise prophets who will save my Brown nation and work with this nation, which I have established and chosen!" (Hexham and Oosthuizen 1996:2, 3)

It would appear that the dreams and visions Isaiah's grandfather had prompted the family to move away from Zululand to settle in the hills of Harrismith (North western Natal). Fear of King Shaka caused ordinary people like the Shembe family to relocate outside of the king's reach.[1] Yet, in "re-membering" the event Isaiah restates his story and sets it in the context of the biblical narrative where the baby Jesus is taken away to Egypt for fear of being killed when Herod heard of the birth of a new "king." Isaiah Shembe, speaking in pseudo-biblical language, locates his family's experience in the biblical text, with the result that his followers see him as Jesus' equal or successor.

To show that Isaiah Shembe was more than human to his followers, Mthembeni Mpanza (nd:2, 3) relates several encounters that Sitheya, Isaiah's mother, experienced before his birth, showing Isaiah as one whom God foreordained to be a prophet to the Zulu nation:

> ...when she was alone in the veld, she would always hear a voice saying to her, "Sitheya, my child, never spoil yourself, for you will give birth to the Messenger of God, Shembe." This voice called out of thin air, but she could not see the person uttering [the words]. She did not know what the voice meant, or where it came from. On another day when she was collecting fire-wood... [she] saw a beautiful flower. Sitheya rushed to it, picked it and put

> it in her mouth. Later on that day she heard a voice saying: What you swallowed was not the flower, but the Holy Spirit." (Mpanza n.d:2, 3)

In similar vein Elizabeth Gunner (2002) recounts the story surrounding the pregnancy of Sitheya, Isaiah's mother. The Lukan narrative of Mary's encounter with the Holy Spirit before the birth of Jesus (Luke 2) is retold here only in this instance with reference to Isaiah:

> When Sitheya was already pregnant, a small voice said to her, 'You will bear a son who will be a special messenger'. She did not though grasp the full significance of the words because she was not a believer. (Gunner 2002:57)

These stories gain authenticity not only through telling and retelling by amaNazaretha members, but they have become interwoven in the biblical narrative. Consequently, for the amaNazaretha members, Shembe functions today as authoritative "Word" alongside the "Written Word"—the Bible. The events recorded in the biblical text are history, they are in the past; but Shembe is present *now*, a visible being who meets the everyday needs of his people. Events in his early life that authenticate his calling to prophethood enhance his status to the point that he is deified in the eyes of his faithful followers. Elevating Shembe to the status of Jesus Christ is what Mike Kitshoff calls "jesufication" (1996b:289); to what extent this is evident today in the amaNazaretha Church today, I will discuss in Chapter 7.

History and Ecclesiastical Structure

The Nazareth Baptist Church was founded in 1911 by the itinerant preacher, healer and prophet, Isaiah Shembe. Isaiah Shembe believed that the

Jewish religiocultural ethic,[2] as he understood it from his reading of the Old Testament, was relevant even for his own day and his Zulu Christian community. Particularly, he believed that the Old Testament laws regarding Sabbath rituals should be strictly and meticulously observed. When his views ran contrary to the beliefs and norms of the African Baptist Church and its leadership, Shembe seceded from the church and consequently initiated his own ministry. However, his first initiation to the Christian faith had come through his association with a Wesleyan congregation. He left the Wesleyan Church, according to one story, when the local minister refused to baptize him by immersion (Hexham & Oosthuizen 1996:33).[3] His charismatic gifting soon attracted a large following.

Although the numbers are difficult to quantify, officials of the church now claim a following of some four million members with adherents in South Africa and the surrounding southern African states. Barrett (his research was conducted in 1995), however, offers the figure of 700,000; this number is probably a little low. However, according to Barrett's statistics (2001:681), the Shembe Church is second only to the Zion Christian Church, which has a membership of seven million.

The ecclesiastical structure of the church is different from other churches in that the leader of the church, Vimbeni Shembe, personally appoints leaders under him. The leadership is divided into three main groups: ministers (*amafundisi*), the highest rank, followed by evangelists (*abavangeli*), and preachers (*mshumayeli*). Others in the leadership structure are the youth, women's, and men's group

leaders. The traditional chiefs, who are not part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, are deemed to rank above the ministers in cultural matters. Two councils are appointed within the church structure. One, a committee of 11 persons—including Vimbeni Shembe—consisting of one chief (*Nkosi*) who is chairperson of the committee, two ministers, two evangelists, two preachers, one lay person (an aide to Shembe), a women's leader, and a men's leader. This committee is appointed by Shembe himself. Evangelist Mpanza reports that the committee convenes at the behest of the leader, Vimbeni Shembe, especially during the month of July, the cultural festival at Ebuhleni. This committee delegates tasks to the ministers' council on an *ad hoc* basis.

The second council comprises all the ministers in the church. Within this council an executive committee is appointed, with representatives of the various geographical regions of the church. The executive committee is elected by the ministers themselves and has 13 elected members: a chairperson, a deputy chairperson, a secretary, a deputy secretary, a treasurer, and eight members. The ministers' council attends to issues such as disputes in the local temples, disciplinary matters, and development projects in the church. From the above structures it appears that the general membership of the church does not participate in voting on matters of polity and other church business. Thus they are excluded from the decision-making process.

In this predominately preliterate or nonliterate community[4], the fascinating oral history as related by the rank and file in the Shembe Church has

made me very aware that I was not simply documenting past and present happenings, but I was engaging people in conversation about that which they passionately believed. This conversation was more than an exchange of information about personal, ecclesiastical, theological, and mundane beliefs and practices. I discovered that narrative, the telling of stories, is the fundamental genus of life. In the words of Walter Ong, people in oral communities

> learn by discipleship which is a kind of apprenticeship, by listening, by repeating what they hear, and by mastering proverbs and ways of combining and recombining them, by assimilating other formulary materials, by participation in a kind of corporate retrospection. (2002:9)

The more I listened to stories, the more I realized that stories give meaning to lives, meaning to a people rich in traditional culture yet torn by the paradox of living in two worlds: the nonliterate, rural, traditional third world alongside the literate, urban, modern first world. The resultant disjuncture creates for the Shembe member a positive, dynamic forum for telling and retelling their own stories. In such an atmosphere of nostalgia, likeminded people who love and care for each other develop into a close-knit community. This communitarian setting creates for the individual a true sense of belonging in a fragmented world.

I conducted more than 70 interviews for this research project, 68 of which I was able to use. I conducted interviews with fifteen ministers, eight evangelists, six preachers, four youth leaders, two women's leaders, and thirty-three lay persons. My initial goal for this project was to secure a wide spectrum of views from many different categories of people in the movement.

I learned that ministers were not chosen because of any specific ability or gifting that they possessed, or even through theological training. Rather, longstanding members who are loyal to the church are rewarded by way of promotion, some moving up the hierarchical ladder from preacher to minister over a period of time, others achieving direct ministerial status at the discretion of the leader. For example, Reverend Ngidi, a high school math and science teacher, told me he was appointed to the status of minister directly from the rank of member in the church. Ministers who are relatively new to the church gain status on the basis of positions held in their previous churches, thus being rewarded for changing their denominational or church allegiance. Recently, however, some individuals attained ministerial status when they were recommended by older ministers with the approval of the leader, Vimbeni Shembe. The average age of the ministers interviewed was 53 years. Many stated that they were "born in the church," meaning that their parents were members of the church before or at the time of their birth. No one had any theological or Bible training. With the exception of one minister who is a school teacher, most ministers had minimal schooling or no formal education whatsoever. However, several ministers are successful business persons in the city of Durban, and some hold important government positions.

Perhaps the only difference between this group and the lay people interviewed was that in some instances the ministers articulated more clearly their beliefs, practices, and myths regarding Isaiah Shembe and his successors.

Although many of these leaders are nonliterate, they are able to quote Bible passages from memory and tell stories about the founder and his immediate successors. This ability appeared to be part of the time-honored tradition of memorizing the words and works of Shembe, the epistemology of ancient oral tradition. Thus, ministers who had personal contact with the living Isaiah or Galilee Shembe seem to have a more authoratitative role in the church. The other factor that would elevate the status of the leaders as compared with the ordinary members is the fact that leaders in their designated geographical locations, in the absence of Shembe, are responsible for assisting members with their everyday problems and needs. The research shows, however, that the content of the responses varied little between one group and the others.

The evangelists and preachers serve in ways similar to the functions of the ministers. In keeping with the hierarchical structure in the church, the evangelist assumes the role of leader in the absence of the minister. Preachers serve under the evangelists with one difference: in a local temple the preacher is in complete control of the service, and he invites ministers or evangelists to participate in the Sabbath service. More often than not, when a minister is present he is given the privilege of delivering the sermon. Youth, women's and men's leaders serve in their respective temples as advisors and leaders at their meetings.

The most important services of the year are when Shembe presides at Ebuhleni during the July celebrations. During the course of the calendar year, two services are held every Saturday, the holy day for the AmaNazaretha Church, at

9.00 a.m. and at 1.00 p. m. These weekly services are convened at various locations throughout South Africa. At the main center, Ebuhleni, the tolling of a bell signifies the beginning of the worship service. At the local temples around the country the preacher announces the commencement of the service just prior to the starting time, thereby alerting worshippers that the service is about to begin. At the sound of the bell or the call to worship by the announcer, people kneel in silent meditation for approximately one minute. The services are led by the local leader— who holds the title of preacher. Sermons are usually delivered by the most senior minister of the church present.

Beliefs and Practices in the amaNazaretha Church

I now examine the beliefs and practices in the amaNazaretha Church. I select the areas that are most critical for solving the research questions: the role of Ancestors, the role of Shembe, and the role of Christ.

Ancestors

To determine the role of Jesus Christ in the religiocultural ethos of the Shembe Church, we had to discern the status and function that ancestors and Shembe have in the lives of the amaNazaretha. The ancestors are still a vital part of the existential lives of the church members.[5] Oosthuizen already pointed out that "Ancestor worship stands at the center of the Zulu tradition" (1968a:3). To what extent this cultural practice affects the work of Christ will be studied in Chapter 7. While the Shembe church now denounces practices like witchcraft and

consultations with *sangomas*,[6] they have not renounced their allegiance to the ancestors.

Shembe members have abrogated some Zulu traditional religious practices, but they still hold to many of the cultural practices. Ancestor "approbation"[7] is still central to them and not any different from the ancestor cult in Zulu traditional belief and practice. To the question, "What are you actually doing when you call on ancestors," interviewees respond first that they do not *worship* ancestors and then, positively, that they *remember* the ancestors or *talk* with them.

I have learned that people in this community still live in a symbiotic relationship with their ancestors. The separation between the living and the living dead is only physical. The living and the living dead comprise one community. Ancestors are consulted in all matters that concern the living. For example ancestors are consulted concerning celebrations such as weddings, funerals, births of children, marriages, purchasing and selling houses, moving to new geographical locations, when misfortune is experienced in daily life, and when advice is needed. When individuals take a long journey, they invoke the protection of the ancestors. Regarding the importance of ancestors, people state that ancestors mediated between them and God, or pointed them to God. Mediation takes the form of requests for everyday needs, healing, and generally whenever people pray.

The symbiotic relationship that exists between the living and the living dead is a reciprocal one. The living survive in everyday life situations through the intervention of the ancestors. In turn, the living dead may also call on their living

relatives for assistance. The request for such assistance comes mainly through dreams. Sometimes, however, when the living experience illness, loss of economic possessions, or even fracture in personal relationships, the cause for such misfortune is attributed to the ancestors' powerlessness and their lack of ability to help as they themselves are in need of assistance.

When pressed to suggest what kind of assistance ancestors need, people suggest that perhaps ancestors had enemies in their living days and the fracture in that relationship was not mended; thus, the ancestors are rendered powerless to assist others until the broken relationship was restored. Others suggest that because the ancestor had committed certain "sins" or wrong doing in life and had not repented before death, the ancestor was still in "jail" and needed extradition. The only way the dead ancestor could be assisted by the living was for the living relatives to ask Shembe for forgiveness on behalf of the ancestor. Subsequently, the ancestor would be restored to join his family of ancestors, then becoming effective in his or her role as mediator, guardian, and helper of the living. The process of eradicating the "sins" of the ancestors is made through the paying of *nikela*, a certain sum of money, to Shembe.

This system of payment is akin to the Roman Catholic system of paying indulgences on behalf of the dead. Martin Luther protested against this system in which a ticket of release was bought on behalf of the dead, who were then removed from purgatory. Luther, after reading Romans 1:17 came to the understanding that humankind are saved by faith and not by works. While the

Shembe congregants do not use the same terms as the Roman Catholics do, the system is identical to that practiced by the Catholic Church. The system of *nikela* is a ritual that is practiced every time the Shembe congregants come together. People come to Shembe at specific times every day of the week to *nikela.* In the absence of Shembe this duty is delegated to ministers and evangelists. In the local temples the most senior person present, even the preacher, is delegated the responsibility to listen to the petitions from members and respond to their needs. In most instances Shembe responds by saying, "God bless you." This pronouncement is believed to bring about the required result or need of the petitioner.[8]

When interviewees present their petitions and problems to Shembe, he often directs the person to his or her ancestors and suggests that consultation with the ancestor is the appropriate means of solving the individual's dilemma. On other occasions Shembe undertakes to consult the ancestors in question and request a reprieve for the individual's situation. In most instances the individuals return to thank Shembe for mediating on their behalf by way of an offering or *nikela.*

Communication between the living and the living dead is made through animal sacrifices. Cows or goats are slaughtered, and the blood is buried outside the kraal. Zulus have a special hut, *emsamo*, which is dedicated solely for communicating with the ancestors. Shembe members now living in urban and suburban localities keep apart a room in the family home for rituals connected

with ancestors. The ceremony is very sacred, and only the head of the family approaches the ancestors. Meat is sacrificed to the ancestors by burning a green herbal plant, *impepho*, producing a pleasant aroma. It is said that the aroma from the plant and the burned meat rise to the ancestors. The meat is left overnight in the ancestor's hut and during a celebration the next day, the family and friends join to partake of the food.

Vimbeni Shembe, the current leader, perpetuates and encourages the invoking of ancestors, as did Isaiah Shembe his grandfather and ancestor. This aspect of African traditional religion, specifically Zulu traditional religion, is still a central part of the cultural and religious ethos of the Shembe Church. The wellbeing of the Shembe congregants depends on a proper relationship with the ancestors and on reciprocal acts by the living on behalf of the living dead.

This aspect of Zulu religion and culture becomes most acute when one realizes that Zulus do not have a functionary, such as a priest, who mediates on their behalf, as in other living religions. Zulus do not even have the concept of such a priestly intermediary. Kings and chiefs play that role. In the Shembe Church, Shembe and ancestors have that responsibility. Perhaps this belief is one of the reasons why the African Initiated Churches, and particularly the Shembe Church, boasts such a large following among the Zulus in South Africa and why they are gaining new members and adherents even up to the present time: they have revived the ancestor cult while other missionary churches frown upon the invocation of ancestors.

Shembe

Although responses to questions regarding the perception of Isaiah Shembe for the people voiced cognitively and experientially, were varied, the general consensus is that he is more than human. Shembe members see Isaiah Shembe as one who was above the ancestors in rank and therefore who is able to mediate between the living and the living dead. For the Shembe Church, Isaiah Shembe is like God in the sense that he is able to respond positively and effectively to their existential needs. According to Zulu culture, God is inaccessible as he is the Supreme Being and too powerful for a mere human to approach (Oosthuizen 1968a:9); Shembe thus becomes his replacement.[9] In a sense Shembe has become the manifestation of God. The miracle stories as told and retold by members reinforce this idea that Shembe is God in human form. In this regard Mpanza quotes Galilee Shembe as saying,

> A God that only stays in heaven, that does not come down to the people and talk, walk with the people, teach the people and is seen... with the people, is no God. Shembe came and introduced to you God who stays with the people, God who walks with the people, who listens to people's request; that is the God of Shembe; that is the God of the amaNazaretha. (Mpanza n.d.:102)

Stories of Shembe being omnipresent are told with passion and joy when members come together. Members affirm Shembe's omnipresence as an accepted fact when they compare Shembe with Christ, arguing that nowhere in the Bible did Jesus claim to be in two places, separated geographically by some 200 miles, at the same time.[10]

The understanding that Shembe is divine is not separated from his role as Holy Spirit. One tangible evidence of this belief for amaNazaretha members is seen every time Shembe congregants come together to worship. In the larger temples, where the physical infrastructure of the temple grounds is more developed, a tabernacle-like structure is an imposing feature. It is here that the current incumbent Vimbeni Shembe sits when presiding over the Sabbath worship service. Before the service begins, and before Shembe enters the tabernacle, a huge pillow covered in beautiful embroided material and wrapped in a grass mat is brought into the tabernacle. Congregants kneel while the pillow is carried into the temple. The attendant very reverently, purposefully, and carefully unwraps the pillow. At the end of the service the pillow is wrapped again and returned to Shembe's house. The pillow represents Isaiah Shembe and the Holy Spirit. Shembe members say that *Isaiah Shembe* is not the Holy Spirit, but *Shembe* is the Holy Spirit. As explained by one evangelist, "Shembe existed before Isaiah Shembe was born." This belief is connected with the story told of Isaiah Shembe's mother eating a flower not long before he was conceived. The flower was said to represent the Holy Spirit.

Shembe ministers and members use the Bible to reinforce their belief that Shembe is the Holy Spirit. They refer to the words of Jesus in John chapters 14-16, where Jesus promises the coming of the Holy Spirit when he leaves. Shembe members interpret these passages literally and believe that the reference is to Shembe. [11]

Regarding the role of Vimbeni Shembe today in relationship to Isaiah Shembe and the leaders after him, Johannes Galilee Shembe and Amos Shembe, amaNazaretha members believe that the Holy Spirit that was present in Jesus Christ, Isaiah Shembe, Galilee Shembe and Amos Shembe is now resident in Vimbeni Shembe. AmaNazaretha members hold to the adoptionist theory that Christ was adopted into sonship at his baptism. Here the outworking of the Trinity comes into focus: the Father speaks to the Son, and the Holy Spirit appears in the form of a dove. For Shembe members, Vimbeni Shembe received the Holy Spirit when he was nominated to succeed his father Amos as leader of the Shembe Church. The narrative believed by Shembe members is that at the funeral service of Amos Shembe, when Vimbeni Shembe was declared the new leader of the church, a rainbow appeared over his head. This event is interpreted as a sign of the Holy Spirit descending upon Vimbeni Shembe.

Vimbeni Shembe is held with the same aura, dignity, and respect as the previous leaders. He is capable of healing people, removing their sins, and responding to their problems and needs. He is able to mediate effectively between the ancestors and the living. Just as Isaiah was considered to be God to the people because of their inability to communicate directly with the Supreme Being, Vimbeni Shembe is cast in a similar role. When asked which Shembe is called upon in prayers and in times of crises, the overwhelming majority believed that all Shembes are one and the same. Older members relate stories about previous

leaders while younger members tell stories about the works accomplished by Vimbeni Shembe.

There is the underlying implicit belief, however, that ancestors are more powerful than the living, and thus the previous leaders, especially Isaiah Shembe, appear to be venerated if not deified. This belief becomes evident in the sermons preached as well as the presence of Isaiah Shembe represented by the pillow in the service. It is also shown when members congregate informally to tell miracle stories that affirm their faith in Shembe and the amaNazaretha Church.

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit plays an important role in the Shembe theology. Central to people's belief is the understanding that the Holy Spirit is a person. Here Shembe clergy and members refer to the words of Jesus to authenticate their belief, using the Johannine passages, especially John 14:26 and 16:7 (Mpanza n.d.:90). These biblical passages use the masculine "he" with reference to the Holy Spirit. Shembe members interpret this pronoun to refer to Shembe. The words of Jesus, claiming that he has to go before the Holy Spirit comes, further enforce the belief that the Sprit that was in Christ is now in Shembe. Shembe members do not themselves possess the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given only to certain individuals whom God chooses. God chose Jesus Christ, and now he has chosen Shembe. The miraculous works done by Jesus, and now by Shembe, substantiate this belief. There is a sense of ambivalence when Shembe members say that Shembe "is" the Holy Spirit and also that Shembe "possesses" the Holy Spirit.

The underlying belief is that Shembe has his origin in human parents, like Jesus, and when he received the Holy Spirit he took on a nature that is supernatural, or metaphysical. The concept of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is present in Shembe theology, but it is interpreted differently than in orthodox Christianity. God is Father, the Supreme Being; Jesus is the Son of God; and Shembe is the Holy Spirit (Mpanza n.d.:96-98).

The Role of Jesus Christ

Most of the amaNazaretha believe that Jesus is the Son of God. When pressed to explain, however, people express that he was born of human parents and that at his baptism he received the Holy Spirit. God had sent him to the Jewish nation, who killed him although he performed many miracles and did good works. Shembe members do not have a uniform understanding as to where Jesus Christ is now. Their understanding of his present status, role, or existence is unclear. Some suggest that Jesus has returned to the Father. Others say that Jesus is now dead and does not possess any influence over the living. Generally, though, the amaNazaretha believe that Christians are mistaken in believing that Jesus will return, since Jesus is now present in the person of Shembe, whom God sent to the African nation (Mpanza n.d.:90-106).

Shembe congregants believe that Shembe has more power than Jesus solely on the basis of the length of time in which Jesus lived and worked on Earth. They believe that all that Jesus did and said is contained in the Bible. Therefore, comparatively speaking, Shembe has done much more than Jesus ever did in terms

of miracles and healings, as Shembe is still alive and outlives Christ in terms of chronological age.

To further substantiate the belief that Shembe is more powerful than Christ, Shembe members relate stories of Shembe appearing in two different locations at the same time. They argue that nowhere in the Bible is there record of Jesus showing himself to be omnipresent. This belief elevates the status of Shembe above Christ. Many say that their only knowledge of Jesus is what they read in the Bible, but Shembe is present among them, meets their needs, and performs many miracles in their very presence. The implicit idea here for the Shembe members is "Seeing is believing"—that which is visible and tangible is evidential.

The superiority of Shembe to Jesus is also suggested by the Shembe congregants' prayers. The majority say that they pray in the name of their ancestors and Shembe. Jesus does not feature in their prayers. When asked "Who comes to mind in times of need or when problems arise?" people are unanimous that Shembe comes to mind and that they call on the name of Shembe.

Regarding life after death, Shembe members believe that Shembe shows them the way to heaven or to God. He is waiting at the gates to usher them into heaven. Jesus does not feature in this process although he may be there for his "own people" the Jews. The concept of heaven is different from the Christian understanding in that Zulu traditional belief plays a dominant role. Here it is not so much a resurrection of the body but continuity of life and thus immortality. This belief becomes evident in the ceremony of releasing the dead, performed one

year after of the death of an individual. The soul of the departed hovers over the grave until such ritual is performed.

Also the belief in the idea of a "jail" holding dead relatives who need deliverance and redemption is rife in the Shembe Church. Reunion with one's fellow ancestors seems to be more dominant than belief in heaven as understood by Christians. Christ does not feature in any of these beliefs. The table below depicts the fundamental beliefs and practices evident in the amaNazaretha Church.

Table 2. Form and Meaning as Evident in the Beliefs and Practices of the amaNazaretha Church

Shembe: Forms	**Shembe: Meaning**
Members	
1. Pray in the name of Shembe	1. In African and Zulu culture the belief in a mediator or intermediary is not unusual. In Zulu culture especially the chief or king does not communicate directly with his subjects, he has emissaries, or envoys who communicate between the king/chief and his subjects. This religiocultural tradition is carried over into the amaNazaretha Church where the ordinary people do not communicate directly with God but use Shembe and the ancestors as mediators. It is believed that Shembe mediates their requests.
2. Make requests of Shembe: healing, and everyday matters in the home, work and society	2. In the absence of the African diviner, Shembe becomes the vehicle of healing, and meeting all of people's everyday needs. The amaNazaretha believe that Shembe heals and meets their needs with the power he receives from God.
3. Ask Shembe for forgiveness	3. Although everyday immediate needs and holistic living are of paramount importance to the amaNazaretha, they do have a positive sense of the afterlife. Consequently, it is Shembe that removes their sins so that upon death they return to Shembe who is in heaven. Hence the bumper sticker, "Shembe is the way," means that Shembe prepares the way to heaven for his followers.
4. *Nikela* to Shembe for personal, and family requests, and also for the living dead	4. *Nikela* is a system of payment made to Shembe in return for his mediation with the ancestors and also with God. For every type of need or request brought to Shembe, one is expected to pay a sum of money, sometimes a prescribed fee. Followers also pay *nikela* for their ancestors who have come to them in dreams making their requests.

5. Kneeling when Shembe approaches the temple area with hands raised and calling out in unison, "Amen, He is Holy." When approaching Shembe, members also kneel.	5. Members kneel when approaching Shembe or when Shembe approaches the temple area. To some Shembe represents God, while to others he is God. In the absence of the king or the chief, Shembe is accorded the respect that is due to such persons in the Zulu culture. As God or God's representative, the aura and respect that is accorded to Shembe is evident not only by the fact that people kneel in his presence, but also the fact that members cry out "He is Holy" when he appears.
6. Calling Shembe Baba, Nkosi, Holy Spirit, God	6. Reference to Shembe as the Holy Spirit is indicative of the fact that the amaNazaretha see Shembe as the third person of the Trinity. Hence their cry, "He is Holy."
7. Isaiah Shembe is a "living presence" in the Sabbath services represented by the pillow that is brought into the tabernacle area.	7. The sacred pillow before which everyone kneels when it is brought into the temple and tabernacle is representative of the founder Isaiah Shembe. It is said that the pillow brings into the temple the very presence of the spirit of Isaiah Shembe. Isaiah Shembe's deification is in keeping with Zulu cultural traditions, where the Zulus go back to the source thus perpetuating contact with the supernatural world. The success of the present leader is contingent upon his acknowledgement and maintenance of contact with the ancestor Shembe, thus maintaining an intimate relationship with the supernatural world.

8. Stories are told about the life and times and the miraculous works of Isaiah Shembe, Galilee Shembe, Amos Shembe, and the present leader Vimbeni Shembe.	8. Stories told of the four leaders of the church demonstrate the followers' admiration and steadfast belief that Shembe is divine, the Holy Spirit, and also the representative of God. Shembe personifies the God that cannot see, hear, and touch or becoming one with whom they may communicate.
9. Symbols: Wearing pictures of Shembe (all four Shembes or sometimes one) around the neck; the white gown; holy sticks; head gear; the removal of shoes in the compound; prayer mats;	9. The pictures are revered as holy. For example the service has concluded and people remove their gowns, the pictures are removed as well. They will not wear the pictures around their necks when they are doing their ablutions, etc.
Ancestors : Form	**Ancestors : Meaning**
1. Prayer in the name of ancestors	1. In Zulu culture and religion God cannot be approached directly. The amaNazaretha believe that the ancestors are close to God and thus are influential in securing their needs and requests from God. Thus ancestors are mediators between God and people. Also the fact that.

2. Ancestors visit people in dreams	2. Ancestors communicate with the living mainly through dreams, either making requests of the living or assisting or advising them on important family matters.
3. Communicating with their ancestors by talking with them; offering animal scarifies	3. Communication with ancestors takes place in specially designated rooms or huts called *emsamo*. It is here that the living talk with the ancestors, making their requests known. The communication is effected by burning an indigenous herb impepho. It is believed that the smoke, from the burned leaves rise to the nostrils of the ancestors and thus communication is effected. Communication is also effected through animal scarifies, where meat is placed on the *impepho* plant and burned. It is not that the meat is eaten by the ancestors but rather the aroma of burned meat and the *impepho* rises to meet the ancestor. Whether the sacrifices were successful and the ancestors are pleased is known only when the ancestors return in dreams to confirm their satisfaction. Another way that the living feel sure that the ancestors are happy and satisfied is if their life situations improve, or a particular need has been met.
4. On special family and social occasions, the ancestors are invited to the celebrations.	4. The amaNazaretha believe that any change in family structure, additions to the family, moving to a new home, etc should earn the approval of the ancestors. Consequently all celebrations are done with prior notification to the ancestors. In the case of a new-born child, that child becomes a member of the family only after the ancestors have been informed of the arrival and they appear in dreams to offer a name for the child. One cannot move from one dwelling to another until this is sanctioned by the ancestors. If not approved, ill fortune is bound to be the experience of the people who have moved. Likewise for marriages, when a new wife joins the family. Protection will only be afforded for the new bride when the ancestors have been consulted and their approval secured.

5. *Nikela* is paid on behalf of the ancestors: for removal from "jail," or, if the ancestors were not members of the amaNazaretha before they died, the payment given on their behalf restores them to the abode of their fellow ancestors.	5. *Nikela* is an important system in the amaNazaretha church. The living believe that when misfortune strikes, the ancestors were powerless to assist or avert the impending danger to the living family. They believe that the ancestors were rendered ineffective as they are probably in "jail" and consequently need to be freed. They may be in jail for any number of reasons: sins not confessed while living, perhaps a fracture in relationships while living with the situation not rectified; if the ancestor died in a factional fight, or was killed prematurely in a motor accident, in other words if the individual ancestor did not die "well," he will be powerless to assist the living until he himself has been assisted by the living relatives. The living in such instances purchase a ticket of release from Shembe. It is believed that the ancestors then come back to the living in dreams and thank them. The living often testify that their own situation begins to improve, an indication that the ancestors are once again empowered to assist them. Assistance between the ancestor and the living is thought to be reciprocal.
Christ: Form:	**Christ: Meaning:**
1. People read about Jesus from the Bible and sing songs that mention the name of Jesus	1. In the Sabbath services songs are sung that mention the name of Jesus; Bible verses and stories that mention Jesus are read.
2. People acknowledge that Jesus is "The	2. God has many sons, however, and Shembe is one of them.

Son of God"	
3. Identify Shembe with Christ	3. Acknowledgement of Jesus extends as far as identifying him with Shembe.
4. Holy Spirit resident in Christ is now with Shembe	4. Belief in Jesus' words that when he departed he would send the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit that he sent is Shembe.
5. They do not pray in the name of Christ	5. Prayer is in the name of Shembe and the ancestors. Christ is not the mediator between people and God.
6. They do not call on Christ for healing	6. Shembe mediates healing. Jesus Christ came for the Jews. The healings and miracles Jesus performed do not measure up to what Shembe has done and is currently doing.
7. Christ is not relevant for them as he died 2000 years ago.	7. Shembe forgives sin, and thus Jesus becomes irrelevant.
8. Christ cannot save people from their sins	8. Salvation is mediated through Shembe, not Christ. Jesus came for a particular people at a point in time in history.
9. Christ is not mentioned in their sermons	9. Preaching centers on the miracles performed by Shembe.

10. Christ has been replaced by Shembe	10. Jesus does not feature in any of the rituals and practices because Shembe has replaced Christ.

Summary

In this chapter I have attempted to show that the amaNazaretha Church, a predominately Zulu movement, still maintains many of its Zulu cultural practices in its expression of the Christian faith. To what extent they have contextualized and indigenized the Christian gospel will be studied in Chapter 7. What is evident even at this juncture is that the amaNazaretha Church today places a high premium on the status and role of ancestors and its current leader, Vimbeni Shembe. Shembe's position today appears to be deeply influenced by Zulu traditions and culture.

In Chapter 5, I present my research findings relating specifically to my interviews.

Notes

[1] The full text of this episode is recorded in *The Catechism of the Nazarites and Related Writings* Vol. 4, Robert Papini and Irving Hexham eds. (2002: 189).

[2] The Nazarite practice is delineated in the Old Testament book of Numbers 7:1-20.

[3] There are several differing accounts as to why Shembe seceded from the Wesleyan Church and three such accounts are given in Hexham and Oosthuizen, 1996. One account suggests that the Wesleyan minister asked Isaiah to remove his traditional attire (animal skins) and put on Western clothes when coming to church (Hexham & Oosthuizen 1996:32).

[4] From my observation almost all congregants carry a Bible and liturgical songbook to the Sabbath services. Many of them today are able to read from the Zulu Bible and the songbook.

[5] In Chapter 5, I deal with my research findings.

[6] Oosthuizen (1968a), in describing the functions of the *isangoma,* claims that Shembe now fulfills that role for the amaNazaretha member.

[7] I suggest the use of the term approbation for want of a better term that would more accurately describe the interaction between the living and the living-dead. I have avoided, where possible, the terms "worship" and "veneration." I believe they do not bode well with the Shembe congregation. The term approbation nuances the many practices that inhere in their communication with ancestors and the ancestors' communication with the living. The term may include acts such as approval, consent, praise, esteem, eulogize and paying tribute to the ancestors by way of animal sacrifices and *nikela.*

[8] When Shembe grants absolution, it involves three steps: 1) contrition; 2) confession and 3) satisfaction by means of payment. This practice was evident in early Roman Catholic Church history. However, no individual in the Shembe Church articulated the practice in Roman Catholic terms.

[9] Oosthuizen (1968a:9) add that in the absence of God, Shembe "can be directly approached, [and] is now in their midst. It is he who has more intimate contact with the ancestral world than anybody else."

[10] I relate the story as told by members of the amaNazaretha church where it is purported that Isaiah Shembe was seen by eyewitnesses at two different locations at the same time separated by some 200 miles.

[11] Mpanza in his unpublished work, *The Biography of Isaiah Shembe*, (n.d.: chapter 4) devotes a whole chapter to this discussion. Reference to his work and discussion will follow in Chapter 7 again.

Plate 3: The nikela ceremony: a member places her offering in a grass basket while making her petitions to the minister.

Chapter 5

Research Findings Relating Specifically to Interviews

In January 2000, early in my field research, I traveled to Durban, South Africa, to begin investigation of the amaNazaretha Church. At that time I thought that the quantitative approach to field research would be an appropriate strategy for gathering data to solve the research problem. Consequently, I prepared a Likert scale instrument containing 30 statements on a five-point scale ranging from one (not sure) to five (strongly agree). At the amaNazaretha headquarters, Ebuhleni, I invited one of Vimbeni Shembe's close aides, Mr. Sibisi, to fill out the questionnaire. One of the statements in the testing instrument read, "Shembe is God." To this question Mr. Sibisi responded by saying, "It would be wrong to say Shembe is *not* God. It would also be wrong to say Shembe *is* God if we do not explain." He then recounted this story:

> In Zululand (Gingindlovu),[1] 1928, a family planned to attend the July Festival. The money they had saved for the journey was locked in their trunk at home. The daughters of the house went out to collect firewood for their parents who had already left for the celebrations. The parents were expected back home so that the girls could also attend part of the celebrations. While they were out collecting wood, a burglar entered the house through the window and searched for valuables eventually finding the trunk with the money. It was a large sum of money. (I am just narrating a story that Shembe is someone else, someone that we don't know.) There was a postcard-size picture of J. G. Shembe lying on a pillow on the bed. When the burglar looked at the picture on the pillow, the man in the picture, J. G. Shembe, walked out of the picture over to the window and closed the window. (You can't believe that!) How can a man rise from a picture and become a person like you? By that time the girls returned from collecting

> wood. They unlocked the door and found the burglar inside the house. The girls were afraid but the man said, "Keep quiet, I will not kill you.
> I will tell you what happened. I came into the room to steal the money. Here's the money. But that man there in the picture walked out of the frame to the window and closed it and I couldn't open the window until you came." By this time the girls' brothers arrived and listened to the story told by the burglar. They released the burglar after taking back their money. Shembe protects.[2]

Mr. Sibisi went on to relate other stories to make his point that Shembe is an enigma and therefore, responding to the kind of questionnaire I prepared would be totally inadequate; such responses without narrative, commentary, and explanation would misrepresent what the amaNazaretha actually believe and practice.

I realized that the amaNazaretha were not reticent to share their passion, enthusiasm, and exuberance regarding their faith—but that they did this sharing best through narrative, telling stories. I returned to the United States at the end of January 2000 more enlightened about this group of people and revised my questionnaire into a full intererview schedule (See Appendix 1).[3] With renewed hope that a qualitative research methodology would enhance my prospects of gathering data related to the research problem, I left for South Africa again in June 2000. I was confident that I would be entertained with a rich harvest of stories from an oral culture caught in the throes of a fast-changing political and cultural environment.

After my initial research effort in January 2000, I traveled to South Africa on no fewer than six occasions through January 2003. In that time-frame I had

spent 13 months with the amaNazaretha church.[4] The most concentrated period of the research was conducted between June and October 2002. During this time I visited nine temples[5] in the province of Kwa Zulu Natal, where the majority of the amaNazaretha membership resides. My goal for the project was to gather information from 50 persons, who would be the primary sources of my data, and who would come from across the hierarchical structure of the church. I interviewed 68 persons: 15 ministers, eight evangelists, six preachers, four youth leaders, two women's leaders and 33 lay persons (See Appendix 2 for interviewee details). In addition to the interviews, I attended the amaNazaretha Sabbath services on more than 25 occasions as a participant observer, and recorded 12 sermons and 12 prayers.

In this chapter I will report my research findings under the main areas of inquiry: Ancestors, Shembe, and Christ. Under each of these three categories my findings will fall into two parts: first, I will include responses from ministers, evangelists, and preachers;[6] second, I include responses from youth leaders, women's leaders, and lay persons.[7]

My methodology for organizing the data was as follows: First, I typed out the original interviews from the audio recordings on separate pages for each interviewee. I then collected all the data under each of the questions according to the interview schedule. My next step was to collate the responses under each question bringing together similar responses and at the same time showing responses that were unusual.

Originally, I had anticipated that responses from people in the church positions would vary from one another, with the most informed coming from the highest ranking officials of the church (the ministers), and the least informed from members. After analyzing my data I discovered that the responses among the various groups (ministers, evangelists, members, etc) did not greatly differ in terms of content and responses; one group was not more informed that the other. Exceptions were with four individuals with whom I had extended conversations. These were an evangelist, Mr. Mpanza, who is credited by many members as being the "theologian" of the church; his brother, Minister Mpanza; and two other ministers, Gcwenza and Ngidi.

For the purpose of reporting the findings of my study, I found that the data from respondents and their analysis fit generally under the two groupings: (1) ministers, evangelists, and preachers and (2) youth leaders, women's leaders, and members.[8] The former group represents the official voice of the amaNazaretha church while the latter represents the folk or popular views regarding beliefs and practices.

My interview schedule was comprised of 30 questions covering four topics—the three primary categories, Ancestors, Shembe, and Christ, and one secondary category (See Appendix 1). These questions were asked of all of the interviewees including Vimbeni Shembe, whom I had the opportunity to interview in January 2003.[9] I have included his responses in full in Chapter 6.

The Role of Ancestors in the amaNazaretha Church

That the ancestors play an important role in the everyday lives of the amaNazaretha became evident when I heard a powerful story told by Vimbeni Shembe's daughter, Lindewe Shembe. I first met her at a Sabbath worship service held in a busy city park cordoned off by a string of ropes, a clear sign of separation of the sacred from the profane. The ropes were substitutes for the whitewashed stones that normally characterize the amaNazaretha places of worship—a familiar sight today in both rural and urban Kwa Zulu Natal. This site is situated behind a row of hotels that line the ocean, Durban's Bay of Plenty, a popular tourist attraction.

Lindewe arrived after the service had commenced, just prior to the delivery of the sermon. She joined the women in the front row.[10] At the conclusion of the preaching, she came forward and sat in the open space between the men and women. A small grass basket was placed in front of her as the congregation sang. Both men and women came forward, knelt before her and placed their offerings (*nikela*) in the basket. My research assistant, Joseph Mhlongo informed me that it was customary to honor and show respect for the daughter of Shembe as she represented him in his absence. All the money given in the offering that morning was for her benefit. At the conclusion of the service, I asked Joseph if I could request an interview with her. She agreed to an appointment with me for a week later but did not keep the appointment. I called her again at her office in the city and set up a second appointment. It turned out that she had been suspicious of me

and the reason for the interview, assuming that if she offered me an interview and entertained my questions, I would misrepresent her views regarding the church and perhaps divulge the text of the interview to the mass media in South Africa. Consequently, her father would not be pleased with her for entertaining me and my questions. After several attempts, however, I was able to interview her. Joseph, my research assistant, told me that she had first consulted with some ministers that were close to her father about granting me the interview. Also, weighing in my favor was the news she learned that I had interviewed several leading members and ministers of the church.

In the interview with Lindewe she affirmed her belief in the role of ancestors and Shembe by relating this story:

> I started work in Ulundi [capital of Kwa Zulu Natal] for a couple of years and lived in one of the houses shared by four people. I was not serious about church. Even at boarding school I never wore the white gown for church. I did not do the things that we as Nazarites were supposed to do. It so happened that while at work I became ill and was taken home for a week. At this time I was taking driving lessons from an elderly couple. After lessons the lady would drive us back to our place where we lived and we would talk for some time. One of my roommates also took lessons from her. The driving instructor did not know that I had fallen ill and that I had left for home. But she had a dream. When I returned after my illness I received a message from my roommate that the driving instructor wanted to see me. I went to visit her and in our conversation she told me she had had dreams about me and that I was sick. In her dream she came to our apartment and parked at the back flight of stairs to the apartment. She saw a short man with a white gown [presumably Lindewe's grandfather, the late A. K. Shembe and father of the present leader M. V. Shembe] calling for me, and this lady said I was walking with three ladies from the house. She said the man was calling me by another name that she did not know previously (my nickname normally used at home). I had not told my friends my nickname for they would laugh at me; nobody knew it. This lady said she heard the man call me by that name. I said, "I do not believe you because no one

> knows that name." She said the man called me and I left the three ladies and walked up the flight of stairs. The man pulled something from under his arm which I later discovered was a white gown. The man put the white gown on me and said, "I told you long ago to wear this gown. It is the only source of protection you will have from anything, and nothing will ever touch you." She then saw a whole crowd of people dressed like me in a huge field singing and dancing. She could not describe the singing as it was so heavenly. She had never been to our church nor did she know anything about our way of worship. She said she was worried because white is normally worn by the dead. So that is the only story that I share with you. To me that meant that I must go back to the church and live by the rules of the church. (LP:30)

This story reflects the apparent omnipresence[11] and value the amaNazaretha place on the ancestors in their day-to-day living. Dreams about ancestors also give them a sense of stability and assurance that the ancestors are accessible, involved, and are near in times of need. Stories such as Lindewe's are repeated with passion and exuberance by the staunch members of this charismatic church, whether in small group settings or in one-on-one conversations.

To understand amaNazaretha beliefs and practices regarding ancestors, I further subdivided the research focus of the Ancestor category into three questions: first, whether the amaNazaretha worshipped or venerated[12] ancestors and the type of terminology they used to express such worship and /or veneration; second, whether ministers and members had diametrically opposing views regarding the status and role of ancestors; third, regarding ancestral practices, what role ancestors played in the existential life of the amaNazaretha people. In all, I used 13 separate questions for the section on the Role of Ancestors.[13] However, in engaging interviewees in dialogue and conversation, I soon found that the

questions could not be dealt with separately. The responses I received for one question were sometimes repeated and articulated differently for other questions I raised. I have not accounted for questions that elicited similar responses in this section, selecting only questions that elicited responses pertinent to the research problem and its sub-problems.

Ministers' Response to Question 1

I interviewed 15 ministers, eight evangelists, and six preachers for a total of 29 persons in this category. Twenty-three of the 29 interviewees (79%) said they had been raised in the church—their parents were already members of the Shembe church when they were born. None of the respondents had any theological training and only four (14%) had received tertiary education. The most academically qualified in this group was Evangelist Mpanza, who is considered by many members as one of the most knowledgeable regarding the history, ecclesiology, and theology of the amaNazaretha Church. A former magistrate, he is now employed by the Kwa Zulu Natal government, where he serves as Director of Traditional and Local Government Affairs. Apart from my planned interview with him, he granted me several more follow-up conversations, during which I learned more about the structure and belief system of the amaNazaretha Church. At public gatherings this man is often called to speak on behalf of the church and is also quoted by scholars of religion who have researched the amaNazaretha Church.

In response to the first part of the question, *"When (a) and how (b) do you communicate with ancestors?,"* all 29 interviewees reported that they communicated with their ancestors to solicit the ancestors' assistance or that out of obligation they invited their ancestors to be present at family and community celebrations.[14] Communication with ancestors was still a very integral part of the amaNazarethas' everyday life. Minister Khanyile responded, "Our belief as Shembe congregants, and also through the teaching of Shembe, is that we speak to them [ancestors] in the morning, day, and afternoon" (MR:5).[15]

Speaking to ancestors means conducting a conversation, believing that the ancestor hears. It may take place anywhere, given the circumstances that necessitates calling on the ancestor. Interviewees emphatically denied that they prayed to ancestors. They made the distinction that when they talk with the ancestor they do not close their eyes; when praying they do. One may also talk with ancestors at home in the room (in an urban dwelling) where no one sleeps, or in a special hut reserved just for the ancestor in rural areas. Occasions that merit invoking an ancestor are many and varied. For example, if an individual has a disagreement with her or his employer, the individual may call on the ancestor to intervene.

In other words, the amaNazaretha call on ancestors when celebrating social occasions, such as the birth of a child, marriage, success in a business venture, or when good fortune comes their way. In addition, "We also talk with our ancestors during ceremonies.[16] On different occasions, for example, when my son is

engaged or there is a wedding, we call on our ancestors to come and be with us during these times,"[17] said Rev. Khanyile (MR:5).

Ancestors are also invoked when calamity strikes or when people are in need—material or physical[18]. One minister responded, "In our culture, and Shembe teaches us as well, we must call on them [ancestors] whenever we have a problem. They can tell us what is going wrong" (MR:8). Another minister said,

> There is a Zulu custom that you must perform for a new baby, but I had not done that because I had a problem.[19] In dreams, the ancestors came to the mother of the baby telling her that this custom must be done for the baby. I went to *emsamo* and burned *impepho*[20] in the *big house*. I took an oath with the ancestors and told them that I will do the custom if they heal the baby. (MR:9)

To emphasize the integral place ancestors have in the amaNazaretha community, one evangelist said,

> When I am in trouble, I wonder why the ancestors are allowing me to experience hardship. I also think that there is something wrong that the ancestors are trying to highlight to me so I can rectify it. If I need something, like a baby, and I am not getting a baby even though I am married, I will talk with my ancestors. Although you don't get an answer at the same time, we believe that the ancestors are listening to you and everyone who is around you keeps quiet while you are slaughtering. (EV:3)

This response suggests that family members are obligated to the *living dead* and that only when they are appeased are calamity and hardship halted by the ancestors' intervention. In this case an animal had to be sacrificed to appease the ancestor before the situation returned to normal.

Additionally, in response to the above question, some respondents suggested that ancestors communicated with them whenever an ancestor needed

assistance from the living relative.[21] Some respondents claimed that ancestors visited the living in dreams and requested food as they (the ancestors) were hungry. I learned that more than hunger, the ancestor felt neglected and one way to regain attention was to ask the living to prepare food for them. This need sometimes requires a special ceremony where sacrificing an animal is not uncommon. It is believed that ancestors communicate such requests through dreams of living relatives.

In response to the second part of the question, "*How* do you communicate with the ancestors," the most frequent response (27 out of 29, 93%) was that communication takes place via animal sacrifice, cows and goats, which includes burning the herbal plant *impepho.* The understanding is that the aroma and smoke from the burning plant rises to meet the ancestors, a form of offering to them. One interviewee explained,

> When I encounter problems, I go to the grave of my Mom and Dad. I tell them I am encountering a problem. After that I will see a difference because they will answer me and help me. The herb *impepho* is used to communicate with the ancestors when it is burned. Then I will slaughter a goat. Later they come in dreams to show their appreciation. (MR:7)

Members' Response to Question 1

The responses to the first part of question one, "*When do you communicate with your ancestors?"* received similar responses to those in the ministers' category. Here the most frequent response (92%, [36 out of 39 respondents]) was that the amaNazaretha call on ancestors in times of need and also when celebrating social and community functions.

One example of the amaNazaretha calling upon ancestors in times of need is articulated through this story:

> Recently, in December, I went to the Amanzimtoti area. I had a gun but I wouldn't let people see it. On the way back home we were stopped at a roadblock and the police searched our luggage. I prayed to God and to our ancestors. I said "Oh God of my father and all my ancestors, please be with me now. Don't let me be embarrassed and disappointed in front of these people. I come to you and trust you, my father, that you will send this message to God." You know what happened? Instead of opening my bag they told me that they were not going to search my bag. They searched everyone else's but they didn't search mine. Then I said, "Well, isn't that amazing if things can be done this way and a reply comes so quickly from my ancestors." (LP:15)

I learn from this narrative that the amaNazaretha firmly believe that they have access to their ancestors at all times and even in mundane everyday situations. In Lindewe Shembe's case, it was her ancestor who caused her to redirect her steps to the church and respond appropriately, wearing the traditional white gown. For the amaNazaretha the white gown is symbolic of purity, and thus wearing the white gown obligates the initiate to conform to the rules, regulations, and restrictions imposed by the church upon its members.

Members say that they communicate with ancestors most frequently through animal sacrifices. While this response was the most frequent (67% [26 of 39 respondents]), two members stated that they offered the ancestors food as a way of communicating with them.[22] Another five respondents said they give the *nikela*[23] for their ancestors. Another four respondents said they go to the *emsamo* and offer prayers[24] to the ancestors. One respondent who had left the Zion Church

claimed that that church disavowed communication with ancestors, and since she holds to that belief, she is now a member of the amaNazaretha Church.[25]

Members present sacrificial offerings to the ancestors on different occasions. For example, one respondent told this story:

> When your first child is born, you must bring a goat and slaughter it and put a bangle on your child's hand. By this you are telling the ancestors that they must take care of this child, guide the child and make him listen [obey]. Even if I try on my own to put this child on the right path, it will not help him if the ancestors are not involved, because the ancestors will say they don't know him. The ancestors will say, "Who is this? We do not know this child." I have to first introduce the child. It will go on like this. I may have ten children, but I have to introduce them first to the ancestors. The ancestors are so important in everything we do. (LP:22)

While there are ceremonies performed when a child is born, there are also ceremonies for the dead. The ancestors play a pivotal role even in death ceremonies of a family member. This belief was explained by the same respondent:

> If my father has passed away, I will fast for one year. At the end of that year, I must clear [introduce] my father with the other ancestors. I must bring a goat and place it in the *emsamo* and talk. I will say, "Listen! I have my father here. He came to you (the ancestors)." We are asking our father to take care of us again. For generations this carries on. Shembe said that this was the right thing. Our African history was not written down. It is all left by word of mouth to us. My father left it for me to tell so I must also tell my sons that if they do bad things it is wrong and you will have bad luck. (LP:22)

One preacher gave an explanation for the sacrificial process. He said,

> In the Zulu custom…you prepare some Zulu beer. Call all your family together and tell them that you are going to be greeting your ancestors and feeding them with food. You slaughter a cow. On this day, you don't take any part of the cow to eat at all. It has to be placed in a position for the ancestors to come and view what has been laid before them. It is at night

> that the ancestors come and look at the food you left them. This is how we communicate with our ancestors. (PR:1)

There are occasions when members solicit the assistance of ancestors without offering animal sacrifices.[26] One member explained the process by which he sought the assistance of his ancestors in finding employment for his son:

> When my son is seeking employment, even if he is educated, I must first take him to the "Big House" [*emsamo*] where we do all the prayers. I will tell the ancestors that "I have a child looking for a job. You are the ones who are taking care of us as we always hope. Please give him a job." So then my child finds employment. (LP:22)

According to Mbiti (1969:25), the *living dead*, are those members of the family who, present in spirit, are still considered important in the family structure of Zulu people. While not explicit in the above account, it is implied that ancestors are mediators[27] between the living and God for the Zulu, and that worship is reserved for God only, although the living dead are respected and honored.[28]

Ministers' Response to Question 2

Pursuing the inquiry whether the amaNazaretha worship or venerate ancestors, I posed the question, "*What are you actually doing when you call on ancestors?*" Sixty-two percent (18 of 29) of the respondents intimated that they "talk" with their ancestors while 34% (ten) suggested that they "remember" their ancestors. My sense was that all respondents were strongly reacting to the common and often uninformed view by outsiders and non-Africans that they worship ancestors. In both formal and informal discussions, I was told, "We do not worship ancestors," even before I asked the question! In all of my interviews

and discussions with Shembe congregants, I was careful and had rarely used the terms "worship and veneration." One evangelist explained, "When I want something from God, I know that my forefathers are close to God because they are dead. I cry to them. Then the ancestors go to God and tell him, 'Our child is crying. Can you give him this and this?'"(EV:7). Another reported, "Christians say we worship our ancestors. They are our parents and grandparents. The only difference is they are no longer with us in the flesh" (MR:13). Evangelist Mkize referred to both the hierarchical order and mediatorial role of ancestors, but made no reference to worship. He said,

> When we pray we don't say, "My Ancestors" but we say, "God of my ancestors." We believe that God will always know my ancestors first before he knows me. So between me and Shembe are my ancestors. So that is why I always mention them first. I believe that by first calling my ancestors, God recognizes that I am calling for attention. And God will say, "There is the son of 'so and so' who I know I am working with." Therefore if God wants to do anything for me he will send my ancestors. God will tell the ancestors that he heard my cry and ask the ancestors to go and do this for me. And my ancestors may say, "No, we cannot do such a good thing for him because he is not taking care of us" (the ancestors). (EV:3)

The evangelist earlier in the interview had placed Shembe under God and above the ancestors in the hierarchial order. There was always a measure of ambivalence as to whether the ancestors or Shembe approach God independently or jointly on behalf of the living. The question this situation raises is whether the traditional Zulu customs and the Christian religious beliefs coalesce to the point that even after almost 100 years the amaNazaretha do not differentiate between the religious and the secular cultural dynamics. Does the Zulu worldview take precedence over

Christian teaching regarding mediation? Yet, since we know that for the African all of life's activities are viewed through religious eyes, so much so that "religion penetrates and propels all of life" (Stine and Wendlund 1990:19), this distinction is difficult to pursue.

Members' Response to Question 2

In this category, respondents (54%, 22 of 39) emphasized that they "talked with" their ancestors while many emphatically denied that they worshiped ancestors. A typical response coming from a medical doctor was

> I believe that ancestors are around us at all times. It is not a matter of ancestor worship. I think we have parallels also in other religions. Jesus Christ himself is an ancestor. In African religion, we believe that my father is not a demon after he dies. My father is a means of communication. He is a conduit. Whatever we report to the ancestors is passed on to a higher being [Shembe] before it gets to God Almighty. (LP:16)

From his response I gather that the amaNazaretha talk with their ancestors out of respect, devotion, and duty, believing that they (the ancestors) have the capacity to mediate between the living relatives and God.[29] The responses here were similar to those of the clergy in that some individuals answered the question by talking about sacrifices to and for ancestors.[30]

Ministers' and Members' Response to Question 3

One response recurred in almost all of the interviews (67 of 68), the belief that the relationship between the ancestors and the living is reciprocal. Inasmuch as the ancestors meet the existential, everyday needs of the living, the living likewise should offer their ancestors assistance. One respondent claimed that

ancestors also encounter problems and consequently solicit the assistance of the living. He said, "Through *nikela* we communicate with the ancestors. When they are in trouble they come to us in dreams" (MR:2). Another minister added, "We also sacrifice for the ancestors if they have problems, like when they have done something wrong [while alive on earth]. We sacrifice something for the ancestors in the form of *umnikelo*—we slaughter a goat or cow" (MR:4). Sins committed by the dead ancestors are remitted when the living offer the necessary payment (*nikela*) to the church.

Although I had not initiated the question, members said that while ancestors guided and protected them, mediated and satisfied their everyday needs, the relationship with ancestors was reciprocal. In light of the new information, I added sub question (3a) to the interview schedule; *"Can you assist ancestors in any way?"* To this question the response was that the living could assist the ancestors through sacrifices and *nikela. Nikela* in this instance took the form of the payment of a sum of money to Shembe, and thus the ancestor in question was relieved of the problem.

Members articulated various kinds of problems ancestors encountered. One respondent explained, "We believe that if the ancestors have gone from here, it is not over. The ancestor's soul is still living. So whatever sins the ancestor has done is the physical life, can be forgiven" (MR:4). Another informant said, "The ancestors tell of all the wrong things they have done. Then the families must go to

Shembe and ask for their forgiveness. After that the sins of the ancestors will be removed" (MR:5).

From my interviews I learned that ancestors, if not remembered, inflict hardship on their living relatives. Only when the living offered animal sacrifices on behalf of the offended ancestor, would living conditions be restored to normality. Others suggested that if the ancestors had been involved in factional fighting, wars, and tribal conflicts, they were separated from other ancestors of the clan. When people died unnatural deaths, for example, by motor accidents, suicide, and even diseases such as AIDS,[31] these ancestors were considered unclean and as such they needed to be purified so as to join the realm of the ancestors.[32] In the interim, however, they were confined to a locality referred to as "jail." Still others may have left this world not having repaired fractured relationships; consequently, they also have been confined to "jail." It is here that the reciprocal relationship between ancestor and the living relative comes to the forefront. One interviewee demonstrated the reciprocal relationship that exists between ancestors and their living relatives in this way. She said,

> When I started selling [as a curio street vender] at the Beach Front there were problems. People would not buy from me. I do not know my mother, because she died when I was a small child. One day my mother came in a dream and said "Where are you living?" I told my mother that we are living with our father at home. My mother asked "Why don't you give me water? You have given me nothing." I told her I did not know that my father was not doing that for her. My mother said "Tell your father to do something for me and then your problem will be solved. You will see the people buying from you." My father did those sacrifices and now things are going right. My father has no work, it is only me. (LP:27)

The same respondent further lamented her present predicament regarding marriage. She stated,

> They [ancestors] can make problems for you. I have been engaged for five years with my husband but not wedded. *Labola* [33] is paid in full but when it comes to doing the wedding, I am prevented from getting married because of problems. People tell me that my mother was not wedded. So my mother is the one obstructing everything. (LP:27)

I then raised a follow-up question: "What can you do about your mother obstructing your wedding?" She responded,

> My father took another woman after my mother died. This lady has married my father, but my mother did not wed my father. We can do something, but the problem is we don't have enough [money]. We can do the wedding for my mother who is dead. I can stand in my mother's place on the dancing ground and do the wedding. The father or brother will be the husband. If the father is dead, the brother will represent the father for this wedding. We can then do the wedding for my dead mother. (LP:27)[34]

Marriage is related to the ancestor cult in this instance since the mother's rights were infringed while she was alive. She was deprived of a proper cultural wedding that involved *labola.* The amaNazaretha church facilitates such weddings of departed ancestors through the dance ceremonies on Sundays. This practice again is a classic example of the church living out its existential life through Zulu cultural norms. This cultural act will raise the question as to how such practices in the church are biblically mandated and acceptable.

One of the respondents, a medical doctor, described further how living relatives may assist the ancestors. He explained the belief in "cleansing" ancestors thus:

> People might have died by car accidents or been eaten by crocodiles so those people are unaccounted for. So we have a *cleansing ceremony* so that they stand right with God. Even to the point that if you are a diabetic or have an amputation, then when you come to God you must come whole. If you have a rotten eye, we have a special offering so that it will be put back. We have this belief that most of the hardship you find in families is because of those ancestors whose problems are not made right by their descendents. (LP:15)

Regarding the belief that because of misdemeanors or unnatural death ancestors are not with the community of ancestors, respondents explained that the method of removing an ancestor from "jail" required the living to make a payment of a sum of money to the present Shembe. Shembe then released the ancestor from his or her place of suffering to join their clan ancestors, a place that is believed to be close to God. Respondents claimed that the ancestor came back to the living relatives in dreams to offer their thanks and appreciation. The ancestors, now free, were again in a position to assist their living relatives. Other respondents said that improvement in their own situations, plus the fact that their requests have now materialized, showed that the living had successfully met the demands of the ancestors, most often by the payment of money (*nikela*) to Shembe.[35] One minister explained,

> If a person died in a tribal clash or fight we must do *nikela* for him and ask Shembe to cleanse him. Only then will he be fit to join the other ancestors and go to a good place. If they are not in a good place they cannot help us. Therefore it is important to take them out of jail and Shembe can help us do this. (MR:8)

The reciprocal nature of the relationship between the living and the ancestor also emerged in the response by one interviewee, who explained,

> Some died as unbelievers [non-Shembe members], some with grudges against one another, so it is imperative for me to go to the prophet and *nikela* for them. Then the prophet can forgive them. It is like the hands that wash one another. They need for me to do that for them. I also need them to help me. (MR:7)

Still another interviewee explained,

> Sometimes things are not going right in our home, and we call the ancestors. They inform us that first they need help. They are in a place where they are suffering and need us to *nikela* for them so that they can help us. We go to Shembe and *nikela* for them. They come back and tell us that all is right now. We see our own situation is better. (MR:12)

Respondents generally alluded to some form of request that ancestors initiated. When living relatives give these requests their due response, usually in the form of *nikela* or animal sacrifices, the situation is resolved. For example, one evangelist said, "Some are languishing in hell and we have to plead to Shembe to release them through *nikela.* They come back in dreams and thank us" (EV4). Another said,

> When they [ancestors] were living they quarreled. They died and didn't sit down and discuss their quarrels. It is for the living to bring the two sides together [the living in this instance act as peace brokers on behalf of their dead relatives by approaching the offended party] by bringing a goat or anything they can afford to rectify the situation. When we have peace amongst the living, there will be peace with the ancestor as well. (EV8)

Another evangelist related this story to demonstrate that ancestors need the assistance of their living relatives. He said,

> When I was still a preacher I was called to the mCharlie house. The family members complained that every night there are people knocking on their door. But when they opened the door there was no one there. I asked them if any member of the immediate family had died. They responded that two of their children died. The boy died in the mines and his body was never recovered. The girl died when a gas stove exploded in the kitchen. I advised

> them to do a prayer for the dead and bring them back home. When you do this prayer you take some leaves, *umlahlankosi,* and burn them where the person died or where the soul left the body. You talk to the spirit and tell it that it is now going home. But the problem was that they did not know where to find their bodies. These people did not know where the bodies were buried. I told them to go to Shembe and tell him the story and ask him to do the prayer by calling the individuals by their name. Ask him to bring these people back inside the gate. They went to Shembe and related their story. Shembe said "God bless you. I am going to bring them now." We then did the prayers with the family and went inside the gate (into the house). After this they lived peacefully. (EV:6)

The amaNazaretha believe that ancestors call for the assistance of their living relatives in the same way that the living call on them for help. My research has demonstrated this reciprocal relationship that exists between the living and the living dead.

These beliefs and practices raise several issues for further discussion. First, is the idea of "jail" and its effects on the afterlife. This concept parallels the idea of purgatory as understood by Roman Catholics. Second, is the belief that one may atone for the wrongs committed by the dead through the payment of a sum of money. This belief parallels the doctrine of indulgences as taught by the Catholic Church in the medieval period of the Western Church. Third, is the power of Shembe to forgive sins. The following chapter (6) will explore some of these ideas believed and practiced in the amaNazaretha Church.

Ministers' Views of Shembe as Ancestor

Evangelical Christians in South Africa, especially those who come into contact with amaNazaretha members daily, claim that the amaNazaretha believe that Shembe is God, and thus they deify and worship their leader. To test this

perception I raised the question in a way that would not appear to be confrontational. I asked, *"How would you differentiate between Shembe as an ancestor and God?"* [36] Of the 29 respondents only four (14%) claimed outright that Shembe is God while others said that he is more than an ancestor--he controls the ancestors to the point that Shembe mediates between the people and the ancestors. Minister Mjadu told this story to attest his belief that Shembe is God. To my follow-up question, "Is Isaiah Shembe then God?" Mjadu responded,

> If he were not God he could not be at Inanda while my forefathers were accompanying him to the station here in Zululand. That is why he is God. He was here *and* at Inanda at the same time. Shembe wrote a letter to my grandfather and gave it to *mkokeli* [women's leader]. He said to Ida, "Go give this letter to Mjadu." But before she arrived here Isaiah himself was here already. He was at Ekuphakameni talking to the people. Isaiah told them he had just come back from Zululand to see if Mjadu was doing his [Isaiah's] work. The people asked "how could you have gone to Zululand when you were here all the time with us?"[37] (MR:4)

Mjadu did explain, however, why he perceived Shembe as God. He said, "We don't say Shembe is God because God came all the way from heaven down to this earth. It is the work that is given to Shembe by God that makes us believe Shembe is God." Another two respondents believed that Shembe is the Holy Spirit.[38] Another minister said, "Shembe is greater than all ancestors because he can instruct the ancestors and tell them what to do" (MR:8). Minister Mpanza believed that since Shembe is omnipresent, he is far superior to the ancestors. He explained,

> In 1998, we were in Manzini, Swaziland where there are hot springs. We met some people there who asked us why we were there. We told them, "We are here for religious purposes. We are coming from the church of

> Shembe." The people knew about the Shembe church already. They joked about this saying, "You Nazarites call a person [Shembe] God. We had an argument with one and it turned out to be intense. We left the man there but told him that because he didn't believe us concerning Shembe, there were severe consequences for his words and actions. In 2000, the same man came here [Ebuhleni]. The man said he came to apologize to Shembe. He said that from the time he had the argument with us about Shembe, he has not been able to sleep. All his possessions were gone. He had cars and cows, but now they were all gone. We asked the man which Shembe would come to him in dreams. We showed him a photo of the three former leaders. We asked him which of these three he saw in his dream. (They have already left so we think they are ancestors.)[39] The man looked at the photo and said that Shembe was not here. Then we took him to M.V. Shembe and the man said that this Shembe is the one who came to him at night. The man said to M.V. Shembe, "Oh my king, I come to apologize. You are the Lord." We also were confused because we did not tell M.V. that we had an argument in Swaziland. Now we began to believe that M.V. is also doing the same thing as the other Shembes. Shembe is omnipresent. There is the belief that when we were arguing, Shembe was there with us. Then M.V. went to this man. Not in the physical, but in the spiritual, and talked to this man, telling him that he was Shembe. (MR:4)

Reverend Mpanza's belief is consistent with those of the amaNazaretha in that the attribute of omnipresence residing in the person of Shembe sets him apart from other human beings, and all the other ancestors. There are several similar stories told of attributes specific to Isaiah Shembe and the succeeding leaders. I was often told that Shembe is an ancestor to his own family, but more than an ancestor to the followers of amaNazaretha.

Members' Views on Shembe as Ancestor

Among the lay people only seven of 38 persons (18% of the respondents) claimed that Shembe is God. The remainder of responses was similar to those in the ministers' category. Arguing that Shembe surpassed the ancestors, one lay person said,

> He is the one who opens the gates. If your ancestors are not good or are not in a good position, Shembe can tell that they are not in a good position or a good place. Shembe will ask us to save them [*nikela*]. Shembe is the leader. Shembe controls the living and the dead. When you die we believe that in your second life you will meet Shembe. (LP:25)

Another respondent told his story of the time he went to Shembe on behalf of his ancestors, and that his ancestors came back to him in a dream and said, "*Siyabonga,* thank you." Relating the story, he said,

> When I joined this church I knew that one of my sisters, Katazile, who died of poisoning, could be helped by the church. I went to A.K. Shembe and paid R20 *nikela*. It was on the Sabbath. On Monday, my sister came to me in a dream. She said, "Thank you." She told me that after she was poisoned she could not drink water. But by paying the *nikela* to Shembe, he removed the poison that she had eaten. Then she said to me, "Can you make a cup of tea. I have not had any since the poison prevented me from drinking anything?" I went home a week later to visit my mother. She is a member of the Methodist Church. When I came by the gate, she was there waiting for me. With a smile she asked, "What were you doing in Durban? I have not dreamed of your dead sister before. I saw her in my dream on Saturday. She was inside the house here. Your sister was dancing like the girls of Ekuphakameni. She wore a white gown and covered her head." Later I went to visit my sister who told me she also dreamed of our sister who had been poisoned. This place is 50 kilometers apart from my mother's house so no one had seen each other. She asked me "What did you do right in Durban, because my dead sister said we should thank you [the brother] because you are the one who helped her by paying *nikela* to Shembe?" (LP:21)

This story like many others, not only reveals the amaNazarethas' staunch belief in ancestors, but also their reliance on Shembe to communicate with and "assist" the ancestors. This story further reinforces the idea among the amaNazaretha that Shembe is by far superior to the ancestors. Yet, one respondent believed that Shembe and the ancestors are equal in stature since the ancestors have the power

to refuse any request made by Shembe. He did, however, qualify this statement by adding,

> We can say that they are equal, yet by paying *nikela* Shembe can change the decisions of ancestors. Shembe is the God of the ancestors and us on earth. For us on earth there is no communication with the ancestors without Shembe. Whatever they do they do through Shembe. In the Bible when Moses was looking after his father-in-law's cattle [sheep] he heard God say, "I am the God of your forefathers go and release the people of Israel." Likewise, Shembe is the God of our forefathers and he is the link between our forefathers and us.
> (LP:2)

This statement raises the question of mediation[40] both on the part of the ancestors and Shembe. It suggests the critical roles held by both ancestors and Shembe in the life world of the amaNazaretha. Yet, there is the underlying belief that God ultimately meets their specific needs. This belief was eloquently stated via analogy by one minister:

> If you write a letter, and there is no [return] address where it comes from, it can reach the place [it was sent] but it will never come back because the one who is to write back to you has no address for you. The ancestors are our address to God. (MR:6)

Another respondent said, "Ancestors are very important to us because they are next to God. [41] We cannot talk to God but the ancestors and Shembe can" (MR:12). In similar vein, another commented, "Although we trust and believe in God, we do remember [call on] our ancestors. The ancestors are part and parcel of everything we receive from God" (MR:4). Regarding the mediatorial interaction between ancestors and Shembe on behalf of the amaNazaretha, one evangelist said,

> The ancestors are ones who communicate [more] effectively to Shembe than the living ones. Shembe can listen to them more than he can listen to you. Shembe knows the ancestors' language much better than our language. (EV:6)

From my observation and conversation with the amaNazaretha, I have hypothesized that the distinction between ministers and members, as understood and enacted in the church both traditionally and historically, does not exist in their church. Yet their rigid hierarchical system clearly draws boundaries between the ministers and members. I wanted to discover whether the members and ministers espoused different views on the status and role of ancestors. Thus, to both groups I raised the question, "*How would you characterize the status and role of ancestors in your cultural and religious practices?*" Among the clergy, 21 of the 29 (72%) of the respondents stated that ancestors were near to God and thus were in a better position to communicate with God and the current Shembe. One minister said, "The ancestors are close to God, and they are my parents physically. They have more power than we [on earth] have. In my opinion, the ancestors can ask God to hurt you or bless you" (MR:9). An evangelist explained, "I believe they [my ancestors] are between me and God; whatever I would like God to do, it works better if it is done through them" (EV:3).

Apart from the mediatorial function of ancestors, six respondents also claimed that ancestors guide and protect them.

Among the members, 21 of 38 persons (54% of respondents) described the status and role of ancestors as being their protectors, while 12 of the 38 (31%)

respondents described ancestors in the role of mediator. One respondent spoke of the time her ancestor warned her of impending danger. She said,

> ... I dreamed of my grandmother telling me that I must immediately leave the place where I was staying. My husband wanted to kill me so he could get the insurance money. I left the house at 3:30 in the morning carrying my child on my back. No one knew where I went. I went to my friend's place and stayed there. Then I heard the rumors that my husband was looking for me. I hid myself to where he could not find me. Then the man who was paid to kill me came back and told me. He told me that he my husband said if I got killed he would receive more money from the insurance policy and he would buy a car. Then I believed that because my grandmother came to me in the dream and told me to wake up and leave that place I was saved. She came three times to me in a dream. It was as if someone was shaking me and I just woke up and went away. I knelt down and prayed to say thank you. I think it was God's power to send someone that looked like my grandmother in my dream. (LP:31)

To ascertain whether the amaNazaretha invoked Isaiah Shembe as their ancestor I raised the question, *"Who do you invoke in your prayers, Isaiah, Galilee, Amos or Vimbeni?"* In the ministers' category, 27 of the 29 respondents (93%) said that no particular Shembe comes to mind as all the Shembes are the same; they possess the same Spirit. However, only two respondents said that they visualize Isaiah Shembe when they pray. Among the members, 35 of the 39 respondents (90%) answered in a similar way to those in the clergy category. Three respondents said that Vimbeni comes to mind when they pray, and one respondent said again that she "prayed in the name of Jesus." The belief among the amaNazaretha is that the physical person is not as important as the spirit resident within him (Shembe). Therefore, when the amaNazaretha pray, no particular Shembe comes to mind, but it is Shembe the Holy Spirit. Evangelist

Mpanza reminded me that Shembe is a surname (family name), and Shembe is also the Holy Spirit. (EV:1) Thus, the amaNazaretha do differentiate between Shembe the person and Shembe the Holy Spirit when speaking. The belief that Shembe is the Holy Spirit, with no differentiation in status among the four Shembes,[42] came home to me in the following narrative. Joseph, my research field assistant, told me,

> Isaiah, J. G., Amos, and Vimbeni, these are people, humans. When we talk about Shembe we don't talk about Isaiah, J. G., Amos or Vimbeni. We talk about the Spirit. That is what was amongst each one of them. It did not leave them. From the first to the present leader each had the same Spirit in them. The same Spirit. When we call them we don't pray in their names. We pray in the Spirit. That is why when I am standing in the mountains, I don't expect Vimbeni to come and help me on this mountain. I expect the Spirit of Shembe to come and help me. (LP:1) [43]

Following this explanation, Joseph offered this story to validate his belief that Shembe is the Holy Spirit and that they do not look at the physical Shembe. He said,

> I can relate this story of a man who came from Swaziland. His name was Jabaluni Zulu. He was a young boy, but it was J. G.'s time looking after his father's cattle. Often, when he was looking after them, he would see an old man sitting on a stone. The old man would come and sit with him and say to him "I want you to go and ring the bell at Ekuphakameni my church. You will be the only man responsible for ringing the bell." This was in Swaziland. He waited for this call for a long time until he heard about the Shembe church. Then he came to Ekuphakameni and met J. G. Shembe. Shembe said, "I have been waiting for you. The man responded, "It wasn't you that called me. It was an older man." Then they showed him the picture of Isaiah Shembe. The man replied, "This is the man who sat on the rock and talked with me, asking me to come and ring the bell. But by this time Isaiah Shembe was dead. J. G. said, "The one who you saw was my father. The Spirit he had then is the Spirit that is now with me." This is why I said that we don't look at personal appearances. We look to the Spirit that is amongst them. Don't look at the biological Shembe. Look at

> Shembe in the Spirit because if you look at the physical Shembe, next time you will fight [argue]. This looks like this or that. You won't know if this Spirit is the Shembe Spirit because you are looking at the physical. (LP:1)

The belief that Shembe is the Holy Spirit and that the same Holy Spirit once imparted to the founding Shembe is transferred to the succeeding Shembes seems consistently present in the religious ethos of the amaNazaretha church. A further question this belief raises is whether there is any room for discussion about the three persons of the Christian Trinity.

In contrast to the above, two respondents claimed that they prayed in the name of Vimbeni Shembe. One of these believed that the previous three leaders delegated their powers to the current leader; therefore, he concluded it was appropriate to call on him. In my findings regarding the status and role of Shembe, I will give further attention to the thinking among some of the amaNazaretha that Shembe is the Holy Spirit, and consequently the physical Shembe is merely the successor who now possesses the Holy Spirit that was resident in past leaders.

To inquire whether ancestors mediate between the amaNazaretha and God, I raised the following question: *"Do the amaNazaretha talk to God directly or do so via ancestors?"* In the ministers' category, 24 of 29 respondents (83%) said they called on both their ancestors and Shembe. Three respondents said that the ancestors talked to God on their behalf, while one respondent believed that he only called on Shembe. In the members' category, 38 of 39 respondents (94%) claimed that they approached God through ancestors *and* Shembe. One respondent,

however, said she prayed in the name of Jesus. The latter, who had been healed of cancer when Shembe prayed for her, said she still believed that God heals and that in her situation God had used Shembe to perform the healing. She has not as yet committed herself to membership in the amaNazaretha.

From my interviews it became apparent that there was no unanimity as to who was called upon first, Shembe or the ancestors, and also as to who approached God on their behalf, Shembe or ancestors. What was confirmed consistently was that both Shembe *and* the ancestors were responsible for mediating between the living and God. This is how one respondent explained their morning devotions:

> We put on our gowns, took the hymnbooks and read the liturgy for the morning prayers. Then we prayed. After reading the morning prayers we opened hymn 234. I began with thanking God for giving us the night we had and I asked Shembe to bless us and our family in Bulwer. Then I asked Shembe to heal my mother and give her more days, so that she will attend my wedding. When we pray we say, "God of Shembe, God of *amakosi* [chief], God of our ancestors" then I mention the things I want from God. We use the same procedure that is used in Zulu culture. When a child wants something it will first go to the mother. We sometimes ask the ancestors first because we believe they are close to God, but Shembe is greater than all my forefathers and chiefs. They all listen to him. (LP:26)

Mbiti suggests that Africans generally feel that out of respect they should not approach God directly and thus they need an intermediary, either a living person—a chief, king, or priest—or the living-dead (1969:67-68). Zulus believe that the living-dead are closer to God and thus are more effective in communicating the needs of their living relatives to God and also in carrying back responses from God to the living via dreams. This belief raises questions for

further study: When does a cultural norm mitigate or supercede biblical norms. Would the cultural norm of ancestor mediation in prayers, healing, and everyday problem-solving be consistent with biblical teachings of Jesus Christ as the mediator?

I recorded some of the prayers to verify if what was articulated in the interviewees' responses was the same as what was actually practiced in the Sabbath services.[44] The following prayers were recorded at Ebuhleni during the July Festival in 2002.

> Father God of Ekuphakameni, we are asking for your angels to come and stop the anger which is finishing the Family of your son. Give long life in the name of Shembe. Amen. (Prayer by Vimbeni Shembe) [45]
>
> Father Shembe, Lord of Lords, we are coming. Lord of the Sabbath, strengthen your word that it would be accepted in the world. Secure us, Jehovah. Amen. (Prayer by a minister)
>
> God of our forefathers we are in front of your face as sinners. We do wrong things daily we ask you to forgive us our sins. Make us to forgive each other where we do not see eye to eye. Give us the power to sit down and settle our problems. All this I ask in the name of Shembe, Amen. (Prayer by a member)
>
> God of our forefathers, we thank you for the day you gave us. We ask you to give us more days. We thank you for good things you do for us. We ask you to give us courage to do the good things for you. All this we ask in the name of Shembe. Amen. (Closing prayer at Sabbath Service by Vimbeni Shembe)
>
> Great God of Ekuphakameni, God of our forefathers Dingaan and Senzangakhona, God of my forefathers Mvakashi and Sogcobe, God of France and God of Stephen and God of Joseph (family). God of our chiefs of Hlengwa Mbuyesa, I am here as an orphan of Hlengwa. Register my name in the book of life, God of heaven and earth. I enter this place today and ask you give me a heart which listens to your rules and regulations. Amen. (member [Joseph]: Morning Service)

> Thank you, Shembe, for inviting me to this temple. Please, Shembe, look at me and love me. Make me to stick to you. Please, my Lord, erase my sins. Shembe, my thoughts must always be according to your ways. (Prayer at the end of the service by member)

> We thank you, Lord, for this day. We ask you to give us more days. We thank you for keeping us [un]til this day of remembrance. We ask you to be present [un]till the next one again. Give us more days and the power to defeat the devil. All this I ask in the name of our Lord, Shembe. Amen. (Benediction Vimbeni Shembe)

I invited two ministers and several members of the amaNazaretha to my lodgings in South Africa one Sunday for discussion and dialogue. At the end of the day when the people were ready to leave they requested permission to pray. I gladly consented. Minister Ngidi concluded in prayer after we sang a hymn from the amaNazaretha liturgical book:

> Holy Shembe, we are here at Phoenix at the house of Moodley. We are asking you to love us and protect us and secure this home we are under and give us the day which is protected by you and the blessing, in the name of Shembe.

Consistent in all of the prayers by members was the name of Shembe, and in two prayers the names of the ancestors and clan chiefs. I discovered that prayers are also given spontaneously and extemporaneously. Shembe and the ancestors are always conscious in the minds of the members. I noted especially that when Vimbeni prayed he concluded his prayer with the words "In the name of Shembe." This practice would confirm the belief that when the amaNazaretha pray, they are praying in the name of and with reference to the living Spirit of Shembe and not the person Shembe. From the data recorded in the research, it would appear that in

religious settings (the Sabbath services) the amaNazaretha more often call on Shembe and not the ancestors, but at cultural events and celebrations, the ancestors feature prominently in the prayers. I have already alluded, however, to the ambivalence where sometimes the ancestors are named, and then Shembe, and at other times, Shembe first and then the ancestors.

The above prayers in different settings raises the question as to whether the amaNazaretha community of believers, even after almost 100 years since the founding of the church, are still grappling with the issue of when and how to invoke the ancestors, given the presence of the physical and spiritual Shembe in their midst. As is evident from the above prayers, the amaNazaretha call on God, ancestors, and Shembe, sometimes all three; and at other times, Shembe and God with the exclusion of ancestors. It would appear that the *written* liturgical songbook brings God and Shembe into focus, and the unwritten cultural traditions and beliefs regarding ancestors "always present in the cultural psyche of the individual" (Ong 2002:73), coalesce in the corporate worship experience. When do the cultural norm and religious belief coalesce in the amaNazaretha beliefs and practices? Does such coalescence result in mixing of beliefs from Christian faith and Zulu culture? I will give attention to this critical aspect of amaNazaretha life in Chapters 6 and 7.

My research shows that the ancestors still remain central in the religious and cultural beliefs of the amaNazaretha, even given their current transitions from rural to urban life, from European dominance to living under a Black democratic

government, and also given the fact that they are moving from an oral, non-literate society to a scripted, literate world. They also use the Old Testament to support their reasons for including ancestors in their beliefs and practices.[46]

My findings on the role and status of ancestors in the amaNazaretha church raise two important questions for me:

1. Since the ancestor cult is still well-established in the amaNazaretha, and is indeed in the mindset of its members, to the extent that members offer sacrifices and give restitution payments (nikela) to Shembe, is there a way of accommodating these beliefs and practices without mitigating the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith?

2. Since the amaNazaretha look to the ancestors as mediators in terms of healing, prayers, and salvation, what role, different from Shembe, could Jesus Christ have as mediator?

Research Findings: Role of Vimbeni Shembe

An essential component in my research was to raise the question of mediation by discovering the status and role Vimbeni Shembe in the religious and cultural ethos of the amaNazaretha Church. The enormous corpus of literature on the movement written over a period of 70 years says very little about the present leader Vimbeni Shembe. He assumed leadership by popular choice when his father Amos Kula Shembe died in 1995. Earlier conclusions about the theology of the amaNazaretha church were based on data from the preaching, teaching, songwriting, and miracles performed by the founder Isaiah Shembe as well as the ministries of Johannes Galilee Shembe and Amos Shembe. For example, Oosthuizen's work, *Theology of a South African Messiah* (1967), studied the

hymns composed by Isaiah Shembe. He concluded that Isaiah Shembe was both mediator and messiah to his people. Oosthuizen states, "Shembe I is not only Mediator but is Messiah, the manifestation of God....Shembe I is to the Nazarites the personification of Supreme Power" (1967:4). With this background, therefore, it was necessary that I discover the status and role of the current leader Vimbeni Shembe, the grandson of Isaiah Shembe, serving in the amaNazaretha church some seven decades after Isaiah's death and after three changes in the leadership.

This section of my findings, like the previous section is divided into two parts. The responses from ministers, evangelists and preachers (ministers), and the responses from lay persons, including youth leaders and women's leaders (members).

As in the previous section, I have selected questions[47] that offer the most pertinent data to make clear the status and role of Vimbeni Shembe in the amaNazaretha Church. The following derived questions from the interview schedule provide helpful clarifications:

1. Would there be a time when you would talk with Shembe and Christ in the same conversation or prayer? Explain.

2. How would your words of address be different when you talk with Christ or Shembe?

3. What are the functions and roles played by Vimbeni Shembe, the living descendant of Isaiah Shembe?

4. Would you say that Vimbeni Shembe is more than a human being? In what way?

5. How is Vimbeni Shembe related to Christ, and does he possess the Spirit of Christ or is he the Christ?

6. Is Vimbeni Shembe capable of removing your sins or does he ask Jesus to forgive you? And is Vimbeni Shembe without sin? Why?

7. There is a story told that Isaiah Shembe was present at creation. Would you cast Vimbeni in the same role? Why?

To ascertain whether Shembe and Christ are treated alike, or if Shembe is elevated in the amaNazaretha prayers above Jesus Christ, I raised the question, *"Would there be a time when you would talk with Shembe and Christ in the same conversation or prayer? Explain.* Among the ministers, the most frequent response (24 out of 29, 83% of respondents) was that the amaNazaretha leadership address their prayers to Shembe or include Shembe among multiple addressees. Four respondents claimed that they did not pray in the name of Jesus Christ. One minister believed that Jesus and Shembe possess the same Spirit, although Jesus is absent and Shembe present physically.

Among the members, seven respondents stated that they prayed in the name of Shembe while ten respondents believed that Christ, upon his departure, left his work to Shembe. Another six respondents said that Shembe and Christ are one and the same person while another nine said that they did not know Jesus Christ. In effect, it would appear that in the most frequent responses (32 of the 39, 82% of respondents), members addressed Shembe and not Christ in their prayers. However, one lay person said that she prayed in the name of Jesus, not Shembe.[48]

One minister used this story to explain the interaction between the ancestors and Shembe, excluding Jesus Christ from requests and prayers. He said,

> Whenever you pray, you first call the ancestors. The ancestors have to determine if you are worthy of the request you are asking of Shembe. The ancestors are the ones who talk to Shembe and say, "He is good, and you can give it to him." But if you are not good[49] to the ancestors they will tell Shembe that you are not good and that he should not grant you your request. There was a line of people going to *nikela* to Baba [Shembe]. Among them was a man who was coming to Shembe for the first time. The man thought that Shembe did not know him. Shembe called him by name. The man just looked at Shembe amazed because he knew Shembe did not know him, and how could he call him by his name. The man came to Shembe and Shembe said, "Your grandfather (ancestor) has come here and told me that you do all these wrong things. So how can you come and ask for good luck now. I must not give you anything that you are asking for." That is why the ancestors are there to ask for us because even Shembe respects the ancestrors' wishes. The ancestors are next to Shembe. The Nazarite Church has grown in this way, because more people come here on instructions from their ancestors. That is why we believe the ancestors can help us, but Shembe is above the ancestors. (MR:4)

The above shows that the amaNazaretha believe that Shembe and the ancestors feature prominently in their everyday religio-cultural life. Seeing that the ancestors are repositories of ethical, juridical, and sacred traditions in the Zulu ethos, the ancestors are in a position to either allow or disallow one's request. It would appear that when the needs of an individual are not met by invoking the ancestors, people approach Shembe. In the above story, Shembe had prior knowledge concerning the man's misdemeanor and fault in the eyes of the ancestors, so Shembe would not allow his request until the fracture in relationship with the ancestors (and consequently living parties as well) was repaired. The story also shows the strategic role Shembe plays in the religio-ancestral cult

among the amaNazaretha. Shembe is positioned to hear from the ancestors and relate their messages to the living. He thus functions as an intermediary between the living and the "living dead." While the above story shows the importance of Shembe and ancestors in the everyday affairs of the amaNazaretha, it also suggests that Shembe's status and role among them lessons the importance of the person and work of Christ. If Jesus Christ does not feature in the existential "salvation" of the individual, as Shembe and the ancestors do, how do we characterize the amaNazaretha (adherents) in terms of their religious affiliation?

One member explained why the amaNazaretha called on the ancestors and Shembe and not Jesus:

> There was King Shaka in Zululand and now there is our present king Goodwill. That does not mean that Shaka was not the king. Likewise we cannot ignore the presence of Shembe. Shembe's name heals us so we can't go and call the name Jesus. Shembe knows Jesus. But we only know about the name Shembe which heals us.

By analogy, the member suggested that just as King Shaka existed historically, so did Jesus. Politically and culturally they do not doubt or dispute the existence of past kings, but they respond to the current incumbent, King Goodwill. Likewise in the church: while they do not doubt that Jesus Christ lived and helped people in his time, his departure opened the way for Shembe who now is capable of responding effectively to people's requests and wishes.

My follow-up question, "*How would your words of address be different when you talk with Christ or Shembe?*" yielded similar responses to the first question among both categories (ministers and members) since the amaNazaretha

do not address Christ in their prayers. The following prayers demonstrate the consistency between the responses from the interviewees and the actual prayers recorded during my participant observation at the July 2002 Sabbath services.

> Father, God of Ekuphakameni, we are asking for your angels to come and stop the anger which is finishing the family of your son.[50] Give long life in the name of Shembe. Amen. (Prayer by Vimbeni Shembe)
>
> Father Shembe, Lord of Lords, we are coming. Lord of the Sabbath, strengthen your word that it would be accepted in the world. Secure us, Jehovah. Amen. (Prayer by a minister)
>
> God of our forefathers, we are in front of your face as sinners. We do wrong things daily. We ask you to forgive us our sins. Make us to forgive each other where we do not see eye to eye. Give us the power to sit down and settle our problems. All this I ask in the name of Shembe. Amen. (Prayer by a member)

In the first prayer above, when Vimbeni Shembe begins, he addresses the "God of Ekuphakameni"—referring to the Supreme Being, uNkulunkulu or Jehovah.[51] It is not clear whether Vimbeni uses the term "God of Ekuphakameni" to refer to Shembe or to the Supreme Being. The prayer ends with the words, "in the name of Shembe." As my research findings will strongly suggest, Shembe is not referring to himself here; neither is he referring to Isaiah Shembe, but the reference is to Shembe the Holy Spirit, transcendent and immanent.

The second prayer by a minister, which begins with "Father Shembe, Lord of Lords," is directed to God Jehovah through the name of Shembe. As was told by most interviewees, not one Shembe comes to mind when they pray. Their prayers are directed to God but go through Shembe the Holy Spirit, the supreme

mediator of all prayers. This belief is also evident in the final prayer with the proviso that the member calls on his ancestors as well.[52]

Because of the framing of the next question, "*What are the functions and roles played by Vimbeni Shembe?*", many interviewees misunderstood it. Consequently, I restated it as "*What are the various duties carried out by Vimbeni Shembe?*" In the ministers' category, I received a total of 40 responses since some interviewees offered more than one answer. The most frequent response (28 of 40, 70% of respondents) was that Vimbeni Shembe was no different from the previous three leaders, who addressed peoples' everyday problems, afforded counsel and advice, healed, and gave leadership to the congregation. Four respondents indicated that Vimbeni Shembe was their mediator,[53] representing them in the presence of the ancestors *and* God, advocating on behalf of the people. Additional responses included descriptions of his functional attributes as leader, such as prophet, leader, savior, and Holy Spirit. One respondent believed that those leaders who succeeded Isaiah Shembe (the prophet) are not prophets themselves; rather they *remind* people of the deeds of Isaiah Shembe. That interviewee saw Vimbeni as a lesser leader than Isaiah.

In the member category, several offered more than one answer to the question just as the ministers did. The most frequent response (27 of 50, 54% of respondents) also was that Shembe was no different from the previous three leaders. However, here there were 50 responses to the question. Again, the less frequent responses concerning his duties, as with the ministers, was the

mediatorial role of Shembe (12 out of 50, 24% of respondents). Less frequent responses were that Shembe was reconciler, messenger from God, prophet, and priest.

Minister Ngidi succinctly defined the status and role of Vimbeni Shembe when he said, "As our leader, we go to him with our problems, sometimes for advice, and as I said we can go to him to *nikela* for our dead relatives (ancestors). He is the spirit of God among us. That's why our people call him God because we can't see God and he does all these miracles for us by asking God" (MR:8). Minister Gcwensa further explained,

> In May 1935 Isaiah's flesh was suffering [Isaiah was ill]. He called his ministers around him and said, "My flesh is tired and will soon be in the grave. But my soul will rise and will cover new flesh." The same Spirit which worked through J.G. Shembe is the Spirit which worked through A.K Shembe and is now working through M.V. Shembe. He is our leader....He has the Holy Spirit to heal, solve problems and communicate with our ancestors and God for us. (MR:9)

A lay person (LP:1) described Vimbeni as one who is capable of reconciling the two wings of the church that split after the death of J. G. Shembe. The interviewee said,

> He [Vimbeni Shembe] called for peace and forgiveness after the church divided into two parts. But he *can* reconcile the church. Reconciliation was the first thing that he called for [when he assumed the leadership].We have one father who started this church. If he could come back to us in person, he will [be] ashamed of us. I see him [Vimbeni Shembe] as a reconciler. I see him as a leader like the others. (LP:1)

From the interviews it became apparent to me that the current leader, Vimbeni Shembe, is treated with awe and respect, no different from the previous

leaders and that the amaNazaretha accord to him a status that is equal to those of the past leaders. Vimbeni Shembe's role among the amaNazaretha is no different from that of the past leaders as he functions in a similar role as one who mediates healing, prayers, and communication with the ancestors.

So as to elicit responses to the question of Vimbeni Shembe's status as divine[54] I asked the question, "*Would you say that Vimbeni Shembe is more than a human being? In what way?*" Among the ministers, nine respondents out of a total of 29 (31% of respondents) believed that Vimbeni is God while eight (28%) respondents claimed that Vimbeni either *possessed* the Holy Spirit or *is* the Holy Spirit. A further five respondents (17%) said that Vimbeni is the living embodiment of Isaiah Shembe. However, these responses cumulatively suggest that interviewees saw Vimbeni as one who is more than human and thus deified in some way.

Responses among lay people differed in that more respondents, 23 of the 39 (59%), believed that Vimbeni is God, while four respondents claimed him to be the Holy Spirit and yet another four respondents said that he is a prophet. A comparison between the two categories reveals that lay people tend to divinize Vimbeni more than the ministers, but more ministers express that Vimbeni is the Holy Spirit. One lay person described Vimbeni Shembe thus:

> When they say God in Zulu it is *UNkulunkulu*. *UNkulunkul*u is something bigger than you can describe. So we just call M.V. *UNkulunkulu* because of the work he does among us. That is why people call him God. He has led the Nazarites for only a few years. He has done great things. When he went to Gospel [temple], people just threw away their wheelchairs. (LP:22)

One layperson who likened Vimbeni to Jesus Christ claimed,

> Even when Jesus was here on earth the crowds would shout out and say that he is God while others did not want to believe that Jesus was God. Because of the works that Shembe does, I believe that he is God. The dead people are made alive here! Even if an accident occurs [motor accident] we still arrive here at Ebuhleni because of Shembe. (LP:24)

A member of the youth movement said "...To me Shembe represents the presence of God. There is not anyone close to Shembe. He is superior to other human beings. He is a supernatural human being" (YL:2). When the amaNazaretha refer to Vimbeni Shembe as God, it is not as though people are oblivious to the reality of the transcendent being *Unkulunkulu.* But in the absence of God as a physical being, Shembe assumes that role for them. The following observation from a youth leader in the church sums up their understanding of how and why Shembe is called God:

> There is a distinction that I want to point out. We believe that God who sent Shembe is using him. God is Shembe himself. This is how God shows himself to the Black people. To us God came as a Shembe. That God, that Spirit, came and covered Shembe. There is confusion about this belief. People who are not members of this church wonder why we call Shembe God. It is because God, the Spirit of God, came to the flesh of Shembe and now rules him. So Shembe does not do anything he likes to do. Shembe only listens to the Spirit that rules him. That is why I call Shembe God though I still mean that he is the Spirit of God. (YL:3)

The "theologian" of the church, evangelist Mpanza, described Vimbeni thus:

> Vimbeni Shembe, our leader, is the symbol of the presence of all our leaders as a successor. But I cannot say that there is anything peculiar with him other than the peculiarity based on the embodiment of the Spirit....He is a human being and Isaiah Shembe was a human being. They may not have the same character but all that we know is that they have the same Spirit. (EV:1)

To pursue further the question of Vimbeni's divinity, relating Christian beliefs and the practices of the amaNazaretha, I raised the question, "*How is Vimbeni Shembe related to Christ, and does he possess the Spirit of Christ or is he the Christ*?" The most frequent response (18 of 29, 62% of respondents) from the clergy was that Vimbeni possessed the Spirit of Christ while eight leaders (27% of respondents) believed that Vimbeni Shembe *is* Jesus Christ. Three respondents said that they had no knowledge of Christ.

In the laity category, first, 11 of 39 (28%) respondents believed that Vimbeni Shembe and Christ are one and the same person while another 11 interviewees (28%) understood Vimbeni Shembe and Christ to possess the *same* Spirit. Second, nine respondents (23%) claimed that they had no knowledge of Christ! Finally, three respondents said that Shembe and Christ are different people.

A tentative response to the question came from a minister who mused, "The problem is [that] I do not know what they mean by Christ, whether the name was given by his mother or whether it came to him when he was baptized by John, since he only received the Holy Spirit after his baptism. If Christ is the name of the Holy Spirit Vimbeni is the Christ" (MR:1). Another minister explained how Vimbeni Shembe and Christ are the same person: "My belief is that when Jesus was going [away] he said he will send another person, the Holy Spirit to us. That

person is Shembe today" (MR:12). One youth leader described the relationship between Vimbeni Shembe and Jesus thus:

> The simple relationship is the spirit of God. The same spirit of God given to Jesus was also given to Shembe. What Jesus did, Shembe is doing now. The miracles Jesus did, Shembe also does now. So there is that interrelationship between the spirit of Shembe and the Spirit of Jesus. (YL:4)

It would appear that the majority among the amaNazaretha connect the person of Jesus Christ with Vimbeni Shembe through the Holy Spirit whom they claim Jesus promised before he departed. Since Vimbeni Shembe possesses the Holy Spirit, that elevates him to a status above a human being. From the amaNazaretha theological terms, it is not really clear what that status may be.

With the next two questions I tried to elicit a clearer response to the question of Vimbeni's divine status among the amaNazaretha.

I asked, "*Is Vimbeni Shembe capable of removing sins?*" The ministers were almost unanimous that Shembe had the power to forgive sins. Only one leader said that Shembe was incapable of removing sins and that it was God's prerogative to forgive.

Among the laity, again, the overwhelming response (33 of 39, 85% of respondents) was that Vimbeni possesses the power to forgive sins. Three did not respond to the question.

I pressed the question further and asked, "*Does Vimbeni Shembe live without sin?*" The ministers responded (21 of 29, 72% of respondents) overwhelmingly that Vimbeni had no sin, arguing that one who possesses the

Holy Spirit cannot sin and that the miracles Vimbeni performs could not happen if he had sin. Two respondents believed that Vimbeni was human, therefore capable of sin, while another two respondents argued that Jesus said that no man is without sin, and thus Vimbeni cannot be without sin. One interviewee said that it was possible for Shembe to have had sin before he received the Holy Spirit in 1995, when he assumed leadership of the church.

The most frequent response from lay people (19 of 39, 48% of respondents) was that Vimbeni was without sin. Five respondents said that they could not judge Vimbeni Shembe, and a further two claimed (as stated previously) that Jesus said that there was no one without sin. I did not elicit responses from 12 interviewees (31%) to this question. However, from the above responses it would be fair to propose that the amaNazaretha firmly believe that Vimbeni Shembe is capable of removing sins and that he is not currently capable of sinning himself.

My conclusion is based on the statements of the amaNazaretha members. One interviewee commented that "God does not send many prophets to earth. People confessed to the one prophet then before Isaiah's day, but now people confess to Shembe" (MR:2). Another minister said,

> He [Shembe] can forgive sins. He communicates with the Creator, God. If he said to God, "Please forgive this person," if he says to you, "You are cursed and I will not see you in heaven," it will happen as he says. (MR:12)

In response to the question about Vimbeni himself possessing sin, one member said,

> We are talking about the Spirit of God, so I don't think the Spirit of God can have sins. If you are talking about M.V. Shembe then I can say that he had sin before the Spirit of Shembe came into him. But since the Spirit entered into him, M.V. Shembe, does not have any sin. (LP:1)

Concerning the sins of those who died before Shembe came, one respondent explained,

> I don't think that the Zulus will be penalized because there were no rules then. But when Shembe came he told us what we can do for our ancestors who died without knowing Shembe. We go to Shembe and *nikela* for the ancestors. The ancestors say, "Go to Shembe and do *nikela* for me so that I [the ancestor] too may join the Church." The ancestors also say, "Join the Shembe church, because when you join you do not go alone but we go with you." That is why we say that the ancestors are not penalized because they did not know. That is why the ancestors encourage us to join the church. (MR:13)

I framed my final question in an endeavor to test the thinking regarding the divinity of Isaiah Shembe among the amaNazaretha and whether such divinity is believed to have passed on to Vimbeni Shembe. I inquired, "*There is a story told that Isaiah Shembe was present at creation. Would you cast Vimbeni in the same role?*" In the ministers' category 18 of 29, (62% of respondents) responded in the affirmative, with the qualifier that it was not the physical Shembe but Shembe the Holy Spirit and thus all four Shembes are included. However, one respondent did not believe that Shembe was present at creation. I was unable to ask this question of all ministers.

Among the laity I only raised the question nine times. Eight of the nine respondents believed that Shembe was present at creation and that all Shembes are one. Therefore, Vimbeni would have been present too, in the Spirit. One minister

explained, "My belief is that Isaiah, the Holy Spirit, was there, not the physical Isaiah. As I have previously said, the Spirit is one, whether Isaiah, J.G., Amos, or Vimbeni. We can say that Vimbeni the Spirit was there too" (MR:8).

There are several stories that the amaNazaretha relate to vouch for their belief that Isaiah Shembe is God. The amaNazaretha, when preaching at the Sabbath services, in informal conversation, in small groups, or when family and friends gather at social events, share stories that relate to the miracles performed by the Shembes. These stories and narratives act as points of reference to deepen faith. They also offer members some semblance of solace, assurance, and stability in the fragile and harsh world that confronts their daily existence. These are stories of healing, deliverance, and mighty acts done in the supranatural that cause the amaNazaretha to regard their leaders, past and present, with an aura of spiritual power to the point of divinization.

One minister recounts, "When Shembe decided to baptize my forefathers he went to the Umlazi River. Here he stopped the river from flowing into the sea. A pool was formed and in it he baptized them. After he had finished baptizing them the river went back into the sea" (MR:2). To point further to Isaiah Shembe's "presence" at creation, one minister related this story:

> One day Shembe said to us [members of the church], "This is the fifth time that I have come to be here [on earth]." Here at South Coast when Shembe came and preached, the people came, listened and joined him. Then Shembe wanted to baptize them, but there was no river close to them. Shembe then asked, "Who is the oldest here? If you are the eldest in this place, what is underneath the earth?" But the people did not know what was underneath. Shembe said, "When you dig here, you will find six stones

> which *we* put when we were creating the earth, me and my father. Those six stones are holding the other stones, underneath them. Dig here and you will find the 6 stones. When you come to the seventh stone, water will gush out." When they dug they found water there as he said. Those six stones are still present. Tourists come to visit this place in South Coast next to [Evangelist] Mkhize's place. This gives us the hope that Shembe is not here for the first time. He came to other places but with a different name, not Shembe. (MR:4)

Another minister tells of a similar story where Shembe parted the river waters.

> When Shembe was at Empangeni, he discovered that the river was full and thus he and his followers were unable to cross over. He instructed his followers to stand in line one behind the other each holding on to the coat of the person in front. Isaiah Shembe said, "Now I am going to ask God to make it possible for us to cross the river. They began singing a hymn when Isaiah Shembe touched the water with his holy stick; immediately the waters parted and formed a wall so that the people could walk across. When they reached the opposite bank Shembe asked them to wait as he wanted to pray to God for allowing then to cross the river safely. He prayed, "Thank you God" and the river immediately began to flow again. These miracles cause me to believe that Shembe is God's worker. (MR:12)

Healing is also integral to the amaNazaretha community as it is in African culture generally. Africans believed that any illness is attributed to a disturbance of the balance between people and spiritual forces. The goal of healing is to restore the equilibrium. Shembe and the ancestors facilitate and mediate in the process. I specifically asked the interviewees about the role Shembe played in healing among the amaNazaretha. Members related several stories to demonstrate Vimbeni Shembe's healing powers.

When I asked a minister what miracles he had witnessed Vimbeni Shembe perform, he told me of the occasion when Shembe visited the church in Johannesburg, some 600 km. from Durban, where he healed two girls who were

crippled. The minister claimed that Shembe commanded the girls to walk, and they were instantly healed (MR:5). Another minister told of the time when a leading academic came to Shembe for healing. He had visited the traditional healers without success. While the minister did not specify the man's illness, he recalled Shembe saying to the man's wife, "Go and buy him some soup, boil it and have him drink it." The man replied, I always drink soup, what kind of soup will heal me?" Shembe replied, "The soup you buy, I will be in it." The man's wife prepared the soup, and the man drank it and was healed. The man responded, "Shembe is God" (MR:7).

I asked one minister if Shembe possessed the power to heal. By way of analogy he explained,

> When I pray I do not say, "God of Rev. Gcwenza." There is a difference. I say, "God of Shembe." As God said to Moses, "I am the God of your forefathers." People will not be healed if I pray in the name of Rev. Gcwenza. (MR :13)

The minister spoke of a delegated responsibility given to him (the minister) where, in the absence of Shembe (physically), he calls on the name of Shembe and healing takes place.

I then raised the question about why Vaseline and water were used in the healing process. Interviewees said that Shembe used these as aids to increase faith in the people, and when they were physically separated from Shembe the use of the Vaseline and water represented him. Vaseline and water in and of itself possessed no healing power or value. One minister explained it thus: "What heals

the people in the Vaseline is the fire of God. Shembe himself is the fire of God, which burns all diseases" (MR:11).

One minister explained how Shembe heals individuals even without seeing them. My question "*When did you last witness a miracle by Vimbeni Shembe?*" prompted this response:

> At the temple Gibizisila, Esikaweni, where the remembrance prayers for Isaiah are held on the second of May, I took my fellow workers to MV [Shembe]. While we were standing in line some people came with a girl 21 years of age. She could not walk and was carried in a blanket. They reported to him [Shembe] that this girl was not walking since birth and is now 21. I want you to understand, that Shembe does not only use Vaseline and water. Sometimes he uses his own spirit. Shembe was inside his house when this young girl came. When Shembe was told about the girl's condition he said to them "God will make her to walk". He said "God will bless her." They said, "Thanks." The people who brought her were lifting her up to leave when she shouted "I want to urinate." She stood up and walked in the presence of all the people.

Healing in the amaNazaretha is also performed through *nikela*. Members come to Shembe with an arbitrary sum of money and mention their needs to Shembe. Shembe responds by saying, "God bless you." Members testify to the effectiveness of this method and they believe that it is their faith in Shembe that heals them.

To summarize, my findings show that Shembe's followers in the amaNazaretha Church believe him to be more than human. Consequently he is able to serve them in a mediatorial capacity where he brings healing and salvation, and also answers their everyday prayers. While the members of the amaNazaretha Church believe that there is a God above Shembe, Shembe himself by virtue of his

miraculous deeds, and by meeting the existential everyday needs of his people, further, has become to his followers the god and savior they see. This fact leads to the further question: If Shembe functions in this critical role for the amaNazaretha, is there still a place for Christ in the beliefs and practices of its members?

Research Findings: The Role of Jesus Christ

The purpose of my study is to discover if the amaNazaretha Church is a Christward movement. A Christward movement is one that recognizes and acknowledges that "Jesus Christ is Lord." To ascertain if Jesus Christ is central in the amaNazarethas' beliefs and practices, I first had to discover the status and role that the ancestors and the leader Vimbeni Shembe hold in the church in its beliefs as well as in its practices. The above two sections in this chapter report my research findings on these prior questions.

In this third section I ask specifically about the amaNazarethas' official position regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ. In Christian orthodoxy one espouses first the words and work of Jesus Christ in terms of his past deeds, especially his atoning work. Second, Christians believe in his present mediatorial role and intercession on their behalf. Finally, Christians hold to a resounding future hope in Jesus Christ's return. To discover the Christology operating in the amaNazaretha Church, I raised a series of question on the status and role of Jesus Christ, *vis a vis* the ancestors and Vimbeni Shembe:

1. Christians generally pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Do the amaNazaretha pray in the name of Christ or in the name of the ancestors?
2. Are the ancestors more important than Christ?
3. How do you characterize your religious affiliation?
4. The bumper sticker says "Shembe is the Way." What do you understand by this statement?
5. Who possesses more power, Vimbeni Shembe or Christ?
6. When a member of your family is ill who do you go to for healing?
7. When you pray do you pray in the name of Vimbeni Shembe or Christ?

To ascertain whether Jesus Christ mediated prayers in the amaNazaretha Church or if ancestors fulfill this role, I asked the question, "*Christians generally pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Do the amaNazaretha pray in the name of Christ or ancestors?*" Among the ministers, the most frequent response (14 of 29, 48% of respondents) was that they do not pray in the name of Jesus but in the name of their ancestors *and* Shembe. A further 12 respondents (41%) said they prayed only in the name of Shembe. Three respondents said that they had no knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Among the members, the most frequent response (24 of 39, 62% of respondents) was that they pray in the name of ancestors *and* Shembe while five respondents claimed that they prayed only in the name of Shembe. A further nine respondents claimed no knowledge of Jesus Christ.

From the above responses in both groups it would appear that prayers are mediated both by Shembe and ancestors. Where respondents said that they prayed only in the name of Shembe, I think that if I had phrased the question differently to include both Shembe and ancestors the outcome may have been almost unanimous.

The following question elicited identical responses in both groups, leaders and lay people. I asked the question, "*When you pray do you pray to Vimbeni Shembe or Christ?*" to ascertain whether the amaNazaretha specifically invoke Vimbeni Shembe in their prayers or Christ. Both ministers and members said they both prayed in the name of Shembe the Holy Spirit and not any one Shembe. However, among the lay people, one respondent said she prayed in the name of Jesus.[55]

I raised the next question to ascertain in what way ancestors affect the person and work of Jesus Christ. I asked, "*Are ancestors more important that Christ?*" The most frequent response from the members (16 of 29, 55% of respondents), was that Jesus was more important than ancestors while the less frequent response (13 of 29, 45% of respondents) was that the ancestors were more important. Members responded in the majority (29 of 36, 80% of respondents) that ancestors were more important; seven respondents believed that Jesus Christ was more important.

I sensed that lay people responded out of their existential everyday experience where ancestors are believed to be actively involved in all of their

affairs, while Jesus Christ is considered to be one whom Shembe replaced. Therefore, Christ plays no direct part in their lives and wellbeing. The ministers who claimed that Jesus was more important than ancestors were arguing from the perspective that if Shembe is above the ancestors and more important, then Christ is also more important than ancestors as he is Shembe's equal.

My next question was to ascertain if the amaNazaretha considered themselves Christian. I asked the question, "*How do you characterize your religious affiliation? Are the amaNazaretha Christian? What are the differences?* In both groups, ministers and members, the overwhelming majority (65 of 68, 96% of respondents) argued that there were several differences between the AmaNazaretha Church and Christians, and thus they are Nazarites not Christians. Three interviewees did not respond to the question.

So as to elicit responses about the amaNazarethas' belief about the afterlife I raised the question "*The bumper sticker, "Shembe is the Way," what does it mean to you*?" The overwhelming response in both groups, leaders and lay people, (64 of 68, 94% of respondents) was that Shembe is the only way to heaven and to God. Four responses were unclear.

My next question received mixed responses. To the question "*Who possesses more power, Vimbeni Shembe or Christ?*," leaders stated that Shembe had more power than Christ (17 of 29, 58% of respondents) while ten respondents in this category believed that both Shembe and Christ were equal (35% of respondents). Lay people were equally divided where 17 respondents (44% of respondents)

believed that Shembe was more powerful, and another 17 (44% of respondents) said that both Shembe and Jesus Christ were equal. Four respondents claimed that they had no knowledge of Christ while one respondent believed that Jesus had more power than Shembe.[56]

In a follow-up question I asked, "*Who is a more powerful healer, Shembe or Christ? When you or a member of your family is ill who do you go to for healing?*" To this question leaders were unanimous that Shembe is their healer and that they call on him. Among members I raised the question 33 times, and 32 (97%) respondents answered that Shembe is the one they call on and that he is their healer. On six occasions I did not raise the question or did not receive a response.

A secondary question that I raised was "*How would you characterize the movement?*" *Is the Shembe faith for Blacks only?"* The most frequent response from leaders was that the church was for all nationalities (25 of 29, 86% of respondents), while four respondents thought it was for Africans only. Members in the majority believed that the church was for all people (18 of 22, 82% of respondents) while one respondent believed that the church was meant for Africans only. I did not raise the question on 17 occasions and three did not respond to the question.

My final question was "*When you encounter problems or are in want who comes to mind first, Vimbeni or Isaiah Shembe*?" Among leaders the most frequent response was that Shembe is one; therefore, it is neither Vimbeni nor

Isaiah (28 of 29, 96% of respondents), and one respondent believed that Isaiah Shembe comes to mind. Lay people gave a similar response as the leaders (33 of 39, 85% of respondents). I did not secure responses from six interviewees.

From the previous sections, concerning the role of ancestors and the role of Shembe in the amaNazaretha Church one could well foresee the results of the third section, the role of Christ. People's perceptions of the role of the ancestors and Shembe left little room for Christ in the church's practices, beliefs, and existential life. However, in answering the questions about the role of Christ, they made it clear as to why they place more emphasis on ancestors and Shembe than on Jesus Christ.

The amaNazaretha seek a faith that is practical, and if Jesus is to be a practical reality, a theoretical, abstract Christology will not bring to the fore something that works for them. In this instance it is Shembe and the ancestors who as mediators can effect healing, deliverance, and salvation in the here and now as well as in the afterlife. Any illness or misfortune that befalls the amaNazaretha opens the question "How did it happen?" and then "Why?" Such illness or misfortune involves the whole person, and then not only the person alone, but the community as well. It goes further to involve the living dead. A healthy body or life is symptomatic of a right relationship with people and the environment, under the watchful eye of the ancestor.

Summary

In summary, my research via interviews brings to the fore the following observations, concerns and challenges.

1. The amaNazaretha Church is more pneuma-centered than it is Christo-centered. Pneumatology for the amaNazaretha is the embodiment of a person, Shembe, a living person. Biblical references, especially the Gospel of John chapters 14 to 16, are interpreted in an unorthodox fashion.

2. The amaNazaretha gravitate more to the Old Testament than the New Testament. Thus very little reference is made to Jesus Christ in their beliefs and practices. Some members of the amaNazaretha Church have no knowledge of Christ.

3. While the amaNazaretha have a firm belief in a transcendent being, they believe culturally that they do not have the capacity to approach such a being. Mediation is achieved through the ancestors and Shembe: ancestors, as they are still an integral part of the community and family, and Shembe as he is the Holy Spirit sent by God. Therefore, Jesus Christ has no role to play in the lives of the amaNazaretha.

4. Zulu culture and tradition supercedes biblical injunctions. Any semblance to biblical norms is taken literally out of the Old Testament. Examples are animal sacrifices, funeral rituals, and food taboos.

5. The amaNazaretha have a different view of the Trinity. They believe that the third person of the Trinity is a living person that Jesus promised before he departed, namely, Shembe.

6. Christian Sunday worship is changed to Saturday "Sabbath" in keeping with the Old Testament. Further, they strongly present themselves as a Nazarite movement, not a Christian Church.

The challenge for Christian mission is how to identify Christianity with African culture without obfuscating essential elements of both culture and Christian religious norms. Is there room in Christian theology for the role of ancestors and what form should such a role take? Finally, the status and role of the leader, Shembe, has to be clearly discerned both culturally and theologically. Chapter 7 on Shembe Christology, and Theology will hopefully address these and other pertinent issues.

In Chapter 6 I will discuss the findings from my participant observation in the activities of the amaNazaretha Church.

Notes

1 This is a small rural town in Kwa Zulu Natal dominated by Zulu speakers.

2 Mr. Sibisi is fluent in English although English is his second language. Thus, his response is a direct quote. I have edited the stories presented in this dissertation to read better grammatically and more fluently, but also endeavored to maintain the sense and intended meaning each time. We learn from narrative studies that oral societies bring the future into the present and thus chronology and historical sequence are not primary. The story, or the event, is the central and primary focus (Ong 2002:136-140).

3 My restated questions allowed for dialogue and discussion rather than eliciting positive or negative responses on a likert scale.

4 In the years 2000-2003 I spent two weeks of each January in South Africa. In the summers of 2000 and 2001, I spent a total of six months in South Africa and then in 2002 I devoted five months from June to October to collecting my data for my project. In all I spent some 13 months working on my field research in South Africa.

5 The term "temple" is used by the amaNazaretha to mean their religious site where Sabbath services are held. The worship place is usually in a vacant piece of property either privately owned or the property of the state or municipal authority in South Africa. Services are conducted outdoors as the amaNazaretha do not own buildings. The only sheltered place or building is the tabernacle–like structure from which Shembe conducts the service. However, some temples do not have the tabernacle structure as these sites are not permanent.

6 I refer to all three in this category of interviewees as "minister."

7 I refer to all these interviewees as "members."

8 When citing interviewees in the text, I have used the following abbreviations to identify the various groups of individuals interviewed: Minister—MR; Evangelist—EV; Preacher—PR; Youth Leader—YL; Women's leader—UK; and members (lay people)—LP.

9 See Chapter 6 for a full account of my interview with Vimbeni Shembe.

10 I describe the seating arrangements for the amaNazaretha worship services in Chapter 6.

11 The amaNazaretha say that the ancestors are close to God, yet they are with them all the time. Mbiti reinforces this idea of "omnipresence" (he does not use that term though) when he says the "living dead" are still people and that they have their "foot in both worlds," guarding the family "activities, traditions, ethics, and affairs" (1969:82). One

member articulated the presence of ancestors thus, "Generally we believe the ancestors are always with us. Whether you are sleeping, driving, eating, we believe the ancestors are always looking after us on behalf of God. They are like angels. As far as communicating with them is concerned, it depends on why you want to communicate with them. It is either as a way of thanking them for anything that you think they have done for you, or as a way of condemning them for letting evil things happen to you. We believe that they are still bound to look after you. If there is a wedding, you communicate with them, if you are getting a new [wife] *makoti* because you believe that the *makoti* must be an additional member in this family for which the ancestors must care" (EV:3 [EV is the code for the church's evangelists in the members category]).

[12] See explanation of terms for meaning of "worship and veneration" in Chapter 1.

[13] Refer to Interview Schedule in Chapter 2 above.

[14] Family and community functions include a variety of cultural and social events such as births and deaths, weddings and engagements, celebrating the purchase of a new home, acquiring a new job, etc.

[15] The minister expressed the idea that his ancestors are his constant companions and that he is conscious of their presence all throughout the day.

[16] Remembrance ceremonies are enacted by the living on behalf of the dead. For example, Joseph Mhlongo, my field research assistant, told me of the forthcoming ceremony he will be conducting, the remembrance ritual for his deceased mother whom he lost when he was barely four months old. The process, as he explained it, is thus: On 29 June he will invite his relatives, friends, and local church community to his home. On this occasion he will sacrifice a goat. On the appointed day his eldest brother will talk with the ancestors at *emsamo* asking them to assist Joseph with his problems (difficulty at work with employer; not enough money to support his family). He will sacrifice the animal in the designated room, cut it into several parts, and prepare it in a cooking pot outside the house. The food will be distributed to men and women (each receiving specific parts of the animal), and one part will be brought back into the room and placed before the *emsamo* for three to four days, for the ancestors. The green herbal plant is burned and the smoke and aroma rise to meet the ancestors. The ancestors may come to Joseph in dreams to acknowledge the sacrifice, but also when Joseph experiences a change in his work and financial situations, he believes that the ancestors responded favorably and that the sacrifice was accepted.

[17] It is necessary to invite ones' ancestors to a wedding so that the ancestors may shower their blessings on the married couple. If one does not invite the ancestors to the wedding ceremony, it is believed that the marriage may not last, or that the couple will encounter problems. Similarly, when a child is born, she or he must be introduced to the ancestors to ensure protection from ill health and other calamities.

[18] Calamities may include loss of a job, sudden illness, fracture in relationships among family or even clans, and accidents that cause serious injuries, etc.

[19] The "problem" referred to by the minister is a colloquial term meaning that one is both economically and financially challenged and thus unable to honor his ritual obligations.

[20] *Impepho* is a green herbal plant that emits a sweet smelling aroma when burned. The amaNazaretha believe that the smoke from the burnt plant rises to the ancestors as an offering to them.

[21] I discuss this response further under question 3a below.

[22] One respondent explained that one burns *impepho* and places a piece of meat on the *impepho.* The smoke rises to meet the ancestors and thus they are happy that they were remembered. The smoke is a gift to the ancestor (LP:8).

[23] *Nikela* is the payment of a sum of money (for offences committed and for requests made) to Shembe by the amaNazaretha. *Nikela* is also made on behalf of the dead by their living relatives. It is believed that the sins committed by a departed ancestor can be eradicated and that the said ancestor subsequently joins the company of ancestors where one is in a position to assist the living.

[24] This respondent did not differentiate between "praying" to and "talking" with the ancestors.

[25] In the section on "The African Independent Churches and their Views on Ancestors," I discuss the Zion Christian Church, the largest AIC in South Africa.

[26] For example a lay person said, "When I have nothing to slaughter I talk to them. I burn *impepho* at the *emsamo*. I pray to them and tell them my problems..." (LP:13). Another layperson explained, "Before I left for Ebuhleni [for the July celebrations] I knelt down and called upon them [ancestors] to guide me and go with me. They offer me protection (LP:2). See the story from LP:15 above. A classic example is of an individual far away from home, community and amaNazaretha temple who calls upon God, Shembe and the ancestors when faced with a difficult situation. No offering is made or promised and no vow taken to offer sacrifices at a later time when his problem was resolved. It was a spontaneous act on his part to call for assistance in a time of crisis. He said, "Oh God of my father and all my ancestors, please be with me now. Don't let me be embarrassed in the presence of these people. I come to God and I trust you my father that you will send this message to God." (LP:15). Another layperson spoke of a miracle in his own life when he went to Shembe asking for a male child, since at that time he had five girls. After visiting Shembe he went home and invoked the ancestors by burning *impepho* in the emsamo. The ancestors then gave him twin sons (LP:24).

[27] One of the functions of ancestors is the mediatorial role they play in the prayers offered by their living relatives. One member described the ancestor's role thus, "Whenever I pray, I first ask them to "clear the line" [open the way] because when I am praying there is a barrier between me and God or Shembe. So it is these ancestors that clear the line. They are my code number to God" (LP:1). One minister explained further the hierarchical structure of the spirit beings and the place of ancestors thus: "We have physical people down here on earth. Above them we have ancestors. Above the ancestors we have spiritual beings, angels. Above the angels we have God. We believe the ancestors are the conduits between us and God. We can never do without them." (MR:8). A medical doctor, member of the amaNazaretha Church, reaffirmed the view that ancestors mediate between the living and God. He said, "My father is a means of communication. He is a conduit. Whatever we report to the ancestors, they pass it on to a higher being before it gets to God Almighty" (LP:16).

[28] See Mbiti's, *African Religion and Philosophy,* Chapters 7-9, pages 58-97 for fuller discussion on the concept of worship, respect, and honor. I also explain the terms in chapter one above.

[29] The hierarchical system (patriarchial) as it functions in a Zulu family was explained to me by a member by way of an analogy. He said that just as a child would first go to its mother with a request, and such request will be taken by the mother to the father, likewise with our ancestors. People cannot approach God directly and their only communication with God is through the ancestors and Shembe. Further, just as children respect, honor and approach their parents with their needs and wants, the ancestors are still part of their family and are approached in a similar manner.

[30] Their responses and discussion are included in my first question above.

[31] Statistics show that two out of every five people in South Africa are HIV positive. The pandemic is most rife in Kwa Zulu Natal, the province where the AmaNazaretha Church has the most members.

[32] It is believed that the soul of the dead will need to be released from the place where the person died in order to be sent back to the community of ancestors. The ritual performed here is that a goat or cow is sacrificed at home, and the blood is sprinkled at the place where the individual died. Alternatively, if the place of death is unknown, the living would ask Shembe to release the soul of the dead ancestor. This act is performed by means of *nikela*—the payment of a certain sum of money for the release of the ancestor's soul.

[33] *Labola* is a Zulu cultural custom having economic implications where in a marriage ceremony, the father of bride receives cows from the bridegroom which traditionally is a payment for the bride. This is called *labola,* or bride-payment.

[34] Although Zulus may be legally married (civil law) and have children, culturally they are not considered married until the male has met the required payment of an agreed upon number of cows. The problem with this interviewee is that her parents were not married according to cultural laws; hence her mother appeared to be preventing her daughter from being married until the living daughter performed the wedding ceremony on her behalf.

[35] I have explained the concept *nikela* in foot note 38 above.

[36] Isaiah Shembe may be considered an ancestor because of the belief held in Zulu traditional religion that important figures in the community, such as chiefs and kings still guide the lives of the community and societal traditions long after their (ancestors) death.

[37] The distance from Inanda to Zululand is approximately 200 kms. In those days a trip by train would take a whole day's journey.

[38] While only two respondents made the claim that Shembe is the Holy Spirit, this belief is strongly implied in the amaNazaretha ideas of a residing Spirit who ministers to the whole tribe. This belief will become evident in the responses in later questions.

[39] This comment is that of the speaker.

[40] Mediation occurs on several occasions in the religio-cultural ethos of the amaNazaretha. Ancestors mediate in the healing process, family disputes, economic and financial stringency, among other situations.

[41] The amaNazaretha believe that ancestors and Shembe are nearer to God than the living. Their status and presence give them greater access to God. John Mbiti, in *Concepts of God in Africa* argues further that the ancestors have acquired a bilingual language, of human beings they left behind, spirits whom they have joined, and God to whom they are closer than when they were physical people (1970:236).

[42] Evangelist Mkize made an interesting comment regarding the four Shembes being one and the same when he said, "Shembe is one in four" (EV:3). I wondered if the Christian understanding of the Trinity—the "three in one" and the "one in three" has influenced the evangelist's belief. I will raise this question in a later study.

[43] I capitalize Spirit when reference is made to Shembe as the amaNazaretha believe Shembe is the third person of the Trinity.

[44] I joined Rev. Gcwenza and his family at their home for the Evening Prayer in August, 2002. The opening prayer was read from the liturgical hymn book (1940:9-14). Then the family engaged in corporate prayer. I was able to discern one person's prayer that went like this: "God of our ancestors, we are in your face; we ask you to be with us this night. We are praying, O Lord, show your greatness; we ask you to show us the work you were sent for by God. In the name of Shembe, Amen." They then sang a closing

hymn (no.195). A closing benediction was offered by Rev. Gcwenza: "God who has all power, we are in your face this evening. We thank you for keeping us on the way we have been. You have protected us. We ask your love, which has no end, to be with us this night. We ask for your love, which has no end, to be with us this night in the name of Shembe, Amen."

[45] This prayer was recorded in the Sabbath service when the congregation was asked to remember the family of the late J. G. Shembe, mourning the death of his youngest wife.

[46] Evangelist Mpanza stated that there is no direct reference to calling the ancestors in the Old Testament. However, by deduction, there are several references that allude to the importance of ancestors. For example, he referred me to the scriptures where God speaks to Moses with words, "And God said unto Moses, thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your forefathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you..." (Exodus 3:15).

[47] To see how these questions flow out of the interview schedule see Appendix 1.

[48] This interviewee, at the time of the interview, was an adherent but not a full member of the amaNazaretha church. She was healed of cancer when Shembe prayed for her. However, she believes that ultimately it was God who healed her and that Shembe was only the instrument.

[49] When the interviewee uses the word *good* in the text he is referring to the living and their respect and obedient response in meeting the ancestors' requests that come to the living in dreams.

[50] This prayer was prayed by Vimbeni Shembe in the Sabbath service when the congregation was asked to remember the family of the late J. G. Shembe whose youngest wife had died.

[51] Oosthuizen (1967:32-33) discusses these terms for the Supreme Being as used in prayers and in the Shembe songbook. He states that Isaiah Shembe claimed to be the revealer and personification of Jehovah and that he claimed messiahship for himself—he claimed to be the Christ.

[52] I make the point earlier (Chapter 4) that from my interviews the amaNazaretha believe that the ancestors are closer to God, understand the "heavenly language," and are better positioned to petition on behalf of the living relatives.

[53] Although interviewees, did not use the exact term mediator throughout the interviews this was stated or implied by means of analogy or story. In articulating the function and role Vimbeni Shembe plays in the life of the amaNazaretha, it became apparent that Shembe functions in such a role.

[54] By divinization I mean Vimbeni Shembe is believed to possess supranatural power that elevates him to the status above a human being, yet he is not God. The amaNazaretha believe that God does exist separately from Shembe.
[55] I have discussed this one respondent earlier. She had not yet committed to membership in the amaNazaretha church.

[56] See note 44 above.

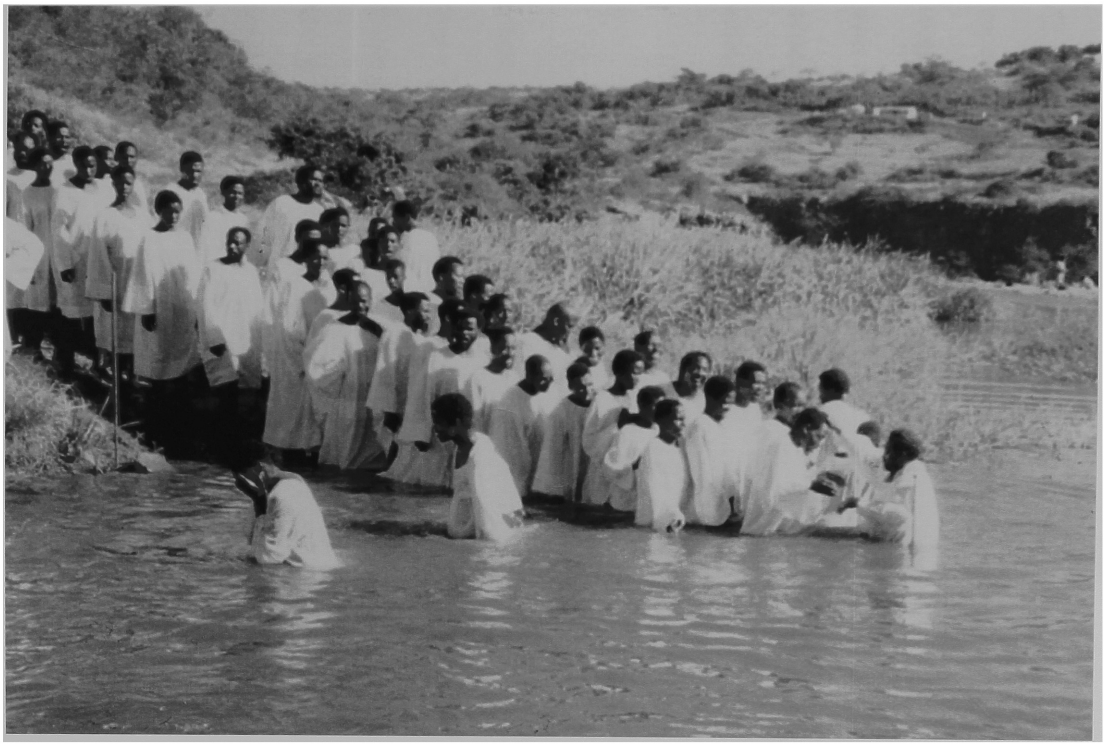

Plate 4: A typical July baptismal service in a river near Ebuhleni.

Chapter 6

Participant Observation in the amaNazaretha Church and an Interview with Vimbeni Shembe

In order to discover what the amaNazaretha members believe about the ancestors, Shembe, and Christ, I observed the people in the context of their worship services. To collect data beyond the interview process, I participated in their Sabbath services and recorded sermons, prayers, songs, and testimonies. In addition to the regular Sabbath worship service, I attended other religious and cultural events in the amaNazaretha calendar.

Religious and Cultural Events in the Church Calendar

The amaNazaretha Church holds two important annual gatherings when members from all over South Africa and neighboring countries congregate for a time of religious and cultural celebration. The first of these is the January celebration that commemorates the founding of the church and Isaiah Shembe's call to the holy mountain Nghlangakasi. This event is convened over a two-week period beginning early in January each year.[1] At the end of the two-week mountain vigil at Nghlangakasi, congregants walk back to Ebuhleni where the celebrations continue until the last day of January.

The Sabbath service on the mountain does not vary from the weekly Sabbath service held during the rest of the year. Vimbeni Shembe convenes the meeting and sometimes preaches; at other times he invites other ministers,

evangelists, and preachers to deliver the sermon. From my observation, Shembe often selects individuals who can report miraculous happens in their local congregations; others have had visions or dreams that Shembe deems worthy of proclamation to the assembly. Such miraculous happenings, dreams, and visions become the centerpiece of the sermon that day.

The annual journey to the mountain takes approximately two hours by taxi traveling through very rugged and at times impassable terrain. About midway through our journey, Joseph, my research assistant, instructed the driver to stop the vehicle as he wanted to point out a huge pile of rocks on the side of the road. This spot is called *Isivivane*, meaning a heap of stones. According to Joseph, the stones are placed at this point to demarcate the journey which the Shembe pilgrims make on foot on their return these stones become a reminder that they had journeyed to the mountain to meet with God and Shembe. The pilgrimage is also a commemorative act. People remember that Isaiah Shembe, the founder, was faithful in obeying the voice of God, and, subsequently he experienced a theophany that in similar circumstances each pilgrim may also experience.

We observed pilgrims stopping at seven prayer stations on their way up to the plateau, a journey that takes approximately an hour from the base of the mountain to the top. A series of white stones marks these prayer points. Joseph informed me that Isaiah Shembe prayed at these points before his encounter with God. One of these prayer stations, I noted, was different from the others. It resembled a huge cement flower pot, approximately six feet in diameter, out of

which hung bunches of colorful wild flowers. At the base of the pot, and all around it, were heaps of *impepho* flowers placed by pilgrims. According to Joseph, this place was where Isaiah Shembe descended to meet with his congregation for their Sabbath services. It would only be some years later that the congregation was allowed to ascend to the plateau of the mountain. The burning of *impepho* flowers was representative of a form of cleansing for the pilgrims as they approached the highest point of the mountain, symbolizing the highest point in their spiritual journey as well.

The other annual gathering is the midyear cultural celebration held for the whole month of July at the church headquarters at Ebuhleni, some 30 kilometers outside the Durban city limits. Thousands of members gather on the campgrounds, bringing with them their supplies for the entire month. Members have constructed specially designated living quarters, *idogolo,* of wood, iron, and mud. As many as five or six people live in one hut during the month of July. Women and men remain separated during this time, and the women's quarters are distanced from those of the men. This is a time of fasting[2] when the amaNazaretha refrain from eating foods containing leaven (yeast). Thus, their food is cooked at home, and bread is baked without yeast.

During the month of July, several cultural and social events take place. Among them are weekly dances, marriages, men's circumcisions, and girls' virginity tests. Weekend activities attract many people from the community, international visitors, and the media. Sabbath services attract as many as 100,000

participants throughout the month, members coming from all over South Africa and the neighboring states. I was a participant observer at some of the July services between 2000 and 2003.

Zulu religion, like other African religions, "is expressed in ritual rather than in dogma" (Oosthuizen 1968a). My participant observation among the amaNazaretha brought this fact home to me as I listened and observed members of the church in worship as well as cultural and social activities.

The amaNazaretha are Sabbatarians in that they follow the principles, practices, and observances pertaining to the Jewish Sabbath as mandated in the Old Testament. Some time after initiating his own movement, Isaiah Shembe changed Sunday worship to Sabbath worship. He called his followers together and said,

> My children, I have been called by God and he informed me that…he prefers you worship him on the Sabbath Day. But the Sabbath is difficult to keep. If you choose to be his children he would like you to worship him on the Sabbath Day and keep it holy as he commanded the children of Israel. (Mpanza n.d.:52)

Mpanza records that some members had doubts about Sabbath worship but deferred to the wisdom of Isaiah Shembe, as he claimed to have received the message from God (Mpanza n.d.:52). It was in this context that Isaiah was inspired to write the Sabbath liturgy which is used three times each Sabbath—Friday at 6.00 p.m. (start of the Sabbath) and Saturday at 9:00 a.m. and at 1:00 p.m.[3]

During the course of the year, two services are held each Saturday, the holy day for the amaNazaretha Church. The first service is held at 9:00 a.m. and the second at 1:00 p.m. Services are convened at various locations throughout South Africa at these times. The services are led by the local leader, the preacher (*mshumayeli*), and sermons are delivered by the most senior member of the church, usually the minister present. While ministers are assigned specific areas of jurisdiction, ministers and evangelists visit temples,[4] sometimes unannounced, and at other times by invitation. Vimbeni Shembe rotates visiting the temples in the larger areas, and more than likely he will spend at least one month at each location. Most of his time during the week, however, is spent at Ebuhleni, the Church's headquarters in Inanda, some 30 kms. from the city of Durban.

The service that I describe here was observed at Ebuhleni on July 5, 2001 at 9:00 a.m. at Ebuhleni. Approximately 20,000 worshippers were present. From about 8:00 a.m., people began streaming into the worship center to take their places. Worshippers brought their own prayer mats made of grass on which they sat.

Women were seated in four groups in front of and on the right side of Shembe. Distinctions were made; married women who had already borne children were seated together. Then, married women who have not as yet borne children sat behind them. Behind them were unmarried women who had borne children. The young women were seated on Shembe's right side. Men were seated on Shembe's left side. Closest to Shembe were the ministers, followed by the

evangelists and the preachers, then the lay members. The chiefs were seated behind Shembe. Visitors were seated behind the ministers, and sometimes they are seated behind Shembe.

All these groups were seated under open skies, in neat rows, the shade from the trees providing the only protection from the elements. Shembe, by contrast, was seated in a brick structure, likened to the tabernacle in the Old Testament.[5] Symbols in the Nazarite "tabernacle" include an oak table covered with a colorful cloth, a vase of artificial flowers, one oak cane chair, a lectern on which is placed Shembe's hymnbook and Bible, and finally a huge pillow, covered with beautifully embroidered material, and wrapped in a grass prayer mat.[6]

The service is preceded by a selection of organ music. The organ, which is a contemporary keyboard, and the organist are situated below the tabernacle, facing Shembe. During this time the processional begins. Two helpers unroll a red carpet onto the concrete-paved pathway where Shembe will walk. The carpet begins from the periphery of the temple worship area, demarcated by white painted stones, and ends at the entrance to the tabernacle. Next, the table and chairs are brought in by Shembe's helpers, some of whom are young girls with their heads and faces covered. Then the vase of flowers, the lectern, and Shembe's hymnbook and Bible are brought into the tabernacle. Finally the pillow also is brought in. The pillow, for the amaNazaretha, represents Isaiah Shembe, the Holy Spirit.[7] Inside the tabernacle itself the helpers do not stand, sit, or walk, but move about on their knees.

Congregants at the service remove their shoes upon entering through the outer gates to the demarcated area of worship. Shembe's aides assist him in removing his shoes when he enters the temple structure's precincts.

During this ceremonial procession, all worshippers remain on their knees, and the ministers also come in to take their seats. The bell rings at 9:00 a.m. at which time people kneel as Shembe enters. They exclaim in unison *Ameni, Oyingcwele!* meaning, "Amen, He is Holy."

The service begins when Shembe announces the person who would lead the liturgy and conduct the singing for the morning service as prescribed in the hymnal. The liturgical readings and singing usually take some twenty-five to thirty minutes. After this time, the leader invites the congregation to join in corporate prayer.[8] The designated person, announced earlier by Shembe, then delivers the sermon.[9] The sermons are based on the ethical teachings of the Bible with particular reference to Sabbath Day observances. Most sermons are crafted around the miraculous deeds of the leaders (Isaiah Shembe, Johannes Galilee Shembe, Amos Shembe, and Vimbeni Shembe). At the end of the preaching, Shembe concludes the service by calling for a closing hymn.

Next, announcements are made by those appointed by Shembe. Most often they deal with monetary issues. There are prescribed fees for different activities in the church. Each member is expected to contribute. After these announcements Shembe prepares to leave the temple and retire to his house located some fifty yards from the temple area. Again, all the worshippers kneel and exclaim *Ameni,*

Oyingcwele! "Amen, He is Holy." Shembe is met outside the tabernacle by a young virgin who assists him with his shoes. When he has finally moved beyond the view of the members, they take their seats again. More announcements follow. Then Shembe's helpers remove the symbols from the tabernacle. During this recessional, the members kneel again.

The final ceremony is *nikela*, a ceremony when members are invited to make offerings for various projects and also when people pay a sum of money for their needs to be heard.[10] This ceremony is conducted by selected ministers who listen to the requests of the members and respond by saying, "God Bless You."

At the conclusion of the service, people leave the worship area via the main exits, indicated by the larger breaks between the white stones. Many congregate outside the church office where vendors sell church calendars, photos of the Shembes, Vaseline, hand-crafted book covers, and the church's liturgical song book. "Tickets," which are taken to Shembe for the release of the ancestors from "jail," are also purchased at the church office.

The officially printed book, *Izihlabelelo zamaNazaretha,* Nazarite Hymns, functions as the formalized liturgy for the amaNazaretha. The Hymnal contains 242 hymns of which the last 22 hymns were composed by Galilee Shembe. The *Izihlabelelo zamaNazaretha* was first published in 1940 under the supervision of Galilee Shembe. It contains the meditations and songs composed by the founder Isaiah Shembe. The faithful, young and old, literate and illiterate alike, carry both the hymnal and the Bible to their places of worship with the utmost care and

dignity (Muller 1999:98). I observed that members came to the worship center with their Bibles and hymn books wrapped in embroidered cloth or with attractive plastic cellophane covers bearing pictures of the founder or one or more of the succeeding Shembes.[11]

The hymnal contains liturgies for both morning and evening prayers and also the Sabbath services. Its format and style resemble the formal liturgies used by western churches today. According to Bongani Mthethwa,[12] "Isaiah Shembe was strongly influenced by the format of Protestant religious worship, particularly as he experienced it as a member of the Baptist and Methodist churches" (1989:2).[13] This influence becomes evident when one reads the acknowledgement at the end of hymns 184 and 194, *isihlabelelo sama Wesile* ("hymn of the Wesleyans") (1989:2). However, as Carol Muller notes, the hymns bear close resemblance to the Psalms in the Old Testament (1999:88). The *Izihlabelelo zamaNazaretha* becomes a sacralized corpus of writing more important that the biblical text. Isaiah's words and works that are now committed to writing take on supra-biblical import. Time and again in my conversation with Evangelist Mpanza, he alluded to a "third testament," meaning that Isaiah Shembe's words and works should be treated as *inspired* works no different than the Bible.

The Sabbath liturgical prayer from the hymnal (J. Galilee Shembe 1940:15-23), combines the Old Testament laws and rules for observing the Sabbath, forms of worship incorporating citations from the Psalms, along with aspects of Zulu

social-religious traditions expressed through music—drums—and dance. Several Old Testament texts demonstrating the worshipper's religious identity and experience are quoted in the liturgy. While Jehovah is invoked, the name of Jesus Christ is conspicuously absent. Isaiah refers to the ancestors in the liturgy when he calls the congregants "Children of *Senzangakhona*" (stanza 19). Common in the liturgy, as the following quote shows, are the mention of "Nazaretha," "Sabbath," and "Jehovah." Stanza 19 reads, "Today is the Sabbath for all people who fear Jehovah. You and your children must heed the law of the Sabbath because it is a great joy to God when the Sabbath is observed. As for me, I beg you, Nazaretha, in the name of the Lord Jehovah, do not harden your hearts, children of Senzangakhona" (1940:18).

During the Sabbath services, I noted the hymns selected and sung each time. I discovered that the selection of the hymns seem to bear no connection with the sermon or the occasion when the service was convened. Hymns selected made reference to Jehovah, Ekuphakameni, legal and moral issues, and the consequences for disobeying the Sabbath and other moral codes. From my observation, the *Izihlabelelo zamaNazaretha* is valued above the Bible and is referred to more often than the Bible. This veneration becomes evident when one observes the morning and evening prayers conducted in the homes of the amaNazaretha. Only the *Izihlabelelo zamaNazaretha* is used on these occasions.

To my mind, the centerpiece of the Sabbath service is the sermon delivered by the person whom Shembe chooses. The preacher faces in the direction of

Shembe, who is seated in the "tabernacle," and the preacher remains on his knees for the whole duration of the sermon, while the congregation is seated. I was informed that the preacher, out of honor and respect for Shembe, addresses him as a subject would approach Zulu royalty—on one's knees!

Sermons

I recorded and analyzed 12 sermons to ascertain the amaNazarethas' beliefs regarding Shembe, the ancestors and Christ. Preachers made reference to Shembe on 48 occasions; they were our references to ancestors and three references to Christ in the sermons. On ten of the 12 occasions, preachers referred to a biblical text in the sermon. The Old Testament was quoted 27 times while the New Testament was quoted 18 times. Sermons usually addressed moral issues in the church and the consequences of disobeying the law. Other sermons centered on miracle stories and the life and times of the Shembes, especially Isaiah Shembe.[14] The chart below depicts the data extrapolated from the 12 sermons.

Table 1. Data from Sermon Extrapolation

Sermon	OT Refs	NT Refs	Refs to Christ	Refs to Shembe	Refs to Anc'trs	Hymns	Theme	Sermon Prompted by...
# 1	3	3	0	2	1	13;110	Loving relationships; The consequences of immoral living	Current malaise in church
# 2	7	1	0	3	0	74	Vimbeni Shembe weeps over the sins of his people	A vision from an ancestor(Amos Shembe)
# 3	4	3	0	1	0	69	You wear white gowns but are still sinners	Sinful deeds of congregants
# 4	0	1	0	3	0	160; 32	Self-aggrandizement	Pride of positions
#5	4	2	0	5	0	213; 127	Listening to the Voice of Shembe is listening to God	Dreams and visions
# 6	0	0	0	4	1	110; 89 104; 98	Behavior at July Celebrations	July Celebrations
# 7	0	1	1	2	0	208	Love one another; it is safe to follow Shembe.	Nazarites' exemplary lives: witness to the world
# 8	4	4	0	10	0	39; 148 107	The Uniqueness of Shembe	The Incomparable Shembe
# 9	1	0	0	4	0	94; 54	Words and Works of Shembe	Pure motives for worship on the mountain
# 10	4	1	1	3	1	107; 64	Abstinence; endorsement of polygamy in the church	Immoral lifestyle of certain individuals in the church
# 11	0	0	1	5	1	45	Preparation for the July celebrations; stories of the life and times of Isaiah Shembe	Isaiah Shembe is sent by God to the Zulu people
# 12	0	2	0	4	0	164; 153; 39	Miracles performed by Isaiah Shembe, J G Shembe, and A K Shembe	Shembe: God's promise to the Zulus
Totals	27	18	3	48	4			

For the amaNazaretha, Isaiah Shembe functions as their enscripurated Living Word. For people in this oral culture, Shembe is in a sense divine and is present in their midst through the telling and retelling of stories about his miraculous and humane deeds. Worshippers believe that Isaiah Shembe's presence is pervasive throughout the Sabbath service, as represented by the pillow in the tabernacle. In many instances, the biblical text is used to support and authenticate the view of the preacher regarding Isaiah Shembe, his words and miracles. For example an 83-year-old preacher, Nyaba, selected Isaiah 41:25 and 43:5 for his sermon (Sermon 8). The former text reads, "I have stirred up one from the north, and he comes—one from the rising sun who calls on my name. He treads on rulers as if they were mortar, as if he were a potter treading the clay." The latter text reads thus: "Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the West." Preacher Nyaba is illiterate, so he called on members to read the text after he cited the biblical reference. With reference to Shembe, he said, "People will say Shembe is not mentioned in the Bible. Read Isaiah 41:25 and 43:5. According to Isaiah 43:5, the verse says that God said to Shembe, "Wherever you go I will go with you. I will bring your generations from the east and the west. They will come to Ekuphakameni." Preacher Nyaba then cited examples of people coming to Shembe from the neighboring countries and provinces, north and south (Sermon 8). Shembe thus functions as a subtext not only in the Sabbath services but throughout the fabric of the amaNazaretha religio-cultural life. In all the preaching that I heard, the name

of Jesus Christ was not mentioned except on three occasions where "Jesus" was part of the biblical text. Further, Jesus Christ did not feature in any part of the Sabbath service.

Prayers

I also recorded prayers at the Sabbath services. Prayers in the Sabbath service are spoken in concert and are led by Vimbeni Shembe. The only individual, free prayer that is said is by Vimbeni Shembe at the end of the service. At the local temples, the service concludes with prayers in concert. These prayers, spoken by individual members in concert, consist of one's personal and everyday family requests and are always prayed in the name of the ancestors and Shembe. I did not hear the name of Jesus mentioned in any of the prayers. Vimbeni Shembe himself prayed in the name of Shembe.

I visited Minister Gcwenza and his family in their home one evening for their evening family prayer. Before the evening meal, the whole family congregated in the living room, all wearing their white gowns. Minister Gcwenza invited Joseph, my research assistant, to read the lesson for the evening prayer. At the conclusion of the reading and songs, the whole group prayed in concert. My analysis of the prayer was that it was not different from that of the Sabbath service. The family members prayed to God in the name of their ancestors and Shembe.

On another occasion I invited two ministers, their families, and three members of the church to my missionary cottage in Phoenix, Durban, one Sunday

for lunch. After our discussion on issues regarding the church structure, beliefs, and practices, we shared a meal that I had prepared. When they were ready to leave, one of the ministers suggested that we should pray before they left for home.[15] The invited guests put on their white gowns and knelt down to pray. Minister Gcwenza read the evening liturgy, and Minister Ngidi prayed, thanking God for my hospitality shown to them and praying for my wellbeing and their safe journey home, concluding his prayer in the name of Shembe. In all of the prayers I heard and recorded only the names of ancestors and Shembe were mentioned, never the name of Christ.[16] The recorded prayers are listed below:

> **Closing prayer at the temple at Ebuhleni: Vimbeni Shembe**
> God of our forefathers, we thank you for the day you gave us. We ask you to give us more days, we thank you for good things you do for us. We ask you to give us courage to do good things for you. All this we ask in the name of Shembe. Amen.
>
> **Prayer at the temple at Ebuhleni**
> **Prayer offered by Vimbeni Shembe for the family of J. G. Shembe**
> Father God of Ekuphakameni we are asking for your angels to come and stop the anger which is finishing [destroying] the family of your son. Give long life in the name of Shembe. Amen. [This prayer was offered following of the death of one of J. G. Shembe's wives.]
>
> **Benediction by Shembe**
> We thank you Lord for this day; we ask you to give us more days. We thank you for keeping us till this day of remembrance. We ask you to be present till the next one again. Give us more days and the power to defeat the devil. All this I ask in the name of our Lord Shembe. Amen.
>
> **Members' prayers at Ebuhleni**
> Father Shembe, Lord of Lords, we are coming Lord of the Sabbath, strengthen your will that it would be accepted in the world. Secure us, Jehovah. Amen.

God of our forefathers, we are in front of your face as sinners. We do wrong things daily; we ask you to forgive us our sins. Make us to forgive each other. Where we do not see eye to eye, give us the power to sit down and settle our problems. All this I ask in the name of Shembe. Amen.

Great God of Ekuphakameni, God of our forefathers, Dingaan and Senzangakhona, God of my forefathers, Mzuzu and Nguqa, God of France and God of Stephen and God of Joseph (family), God of our chiefs of Hlengwa and Mbuyesa, I am here as an orphan of Hlengwa. Register my name in the book of life, God of heaven and earth. Upon my entrance here I ask myself to offer a heart which listens to your rules and regulations. Amen.

Thank you, Shembe, for inviting me. Please, Shembe, look at me and love me; make me to stick to you. Please, my Lord, erase my sins, Shembe. Shembe, my thoughts must always be according to your ways.

Evening Prayer in Gcwenza's House
Opening prayer: Reading from liturgical book (1940:9-14)
Corporate prayer: God of our ancestors we are before your face; we ask you to be with us this night. We are praying, O Lord, show your greatness, we ask you to show us the work you were sent for by God. [Ref to Shembe] In the name of Shembe. Amen.
Closing Hymn 195
Closing prayer: Benediction: Father, God who has all power, we are before your face this evening. We thank you for keeping us on the way we have been going; you have protected us. We ask for your love, which has no end, to be with us this night. In the name of Shembe. Amen.

Sunday Prayer at my rented residence with the ministers Gcwenza and Ngidi and their respective families.
Hymn 242
Prayer: we are here we ask you to remember the good we try to do.
Ngidi's closing Prayer: Holy Shembe, we are here at Phoenix at the house of Moodley. We are asking you to love us and protect us and secure this home we are in. Give us the day, protected by you and blessing in the name of Shembe.

Significant in all of the prayers is the fact that Shembe features so prominently. As one devotee in his prayer asked, "Please, Shembe, look at me and love me; make me to stick to you. Please, my Lord, erase my sins, Shembe. Shembe, my thoughts must always be according to your ways." While it is likely that the reference to "Father God of Ekuphakameni" in Vimbeni Shembe's prayer is a reference to God, one is left in doubt whether the person praying such a prayer has Shembe in mind. What does become evident is that initiates pray both *to* Shembe and also *in* the name of Shembe to God. Petitions are also made in the names of ancestors, as is evident in the above prayers. However, absent from all prayers is any reference to the name of Jesus Christ. This absence also becomes evident when one considers the morning, evening, and Sabbath liturgical prayers recorded in the amaNazaretha hymnbook, *Izihlabelelo zamaNazaretha.* The complete liturgy for the morning, evening, and Sabbath prayers are given in Appendix 4 below. In Chapter 7, I shall refer to the prayers and hymns to determine the Christology present in the beliefs and practices of the amaNazaretha Church.

As a participant observer at the Shembe Sabbath services, I witnessed the amaNazarethas' devotion to and respect for the current leader, Vimbeni Shembe, and also the special place accorded to Isaiah Shembe, the founder. However, the person and work of Christ was absent from the sermons, songs, and teaching and beliefs. In their practices the amaNazaretha invoked the ancestors and Shembe rather than Christ.

Healing Ceremonies

Every service, irrespective of venue or occasion, concludes with a healing ceremony. At the local temples the most senior person presides. Various sizes of grass containers are placed in front of the person presiding. Congregants come forward kneeling, and announce their requests to the person presiding, who is also on his knees. He offers a word of encouragement to the congregant and says, "God Bless You." The congregant places a sum of money in the grass basket, and resumes his or her place in the congregation. Some congregants carry with them Vaseline and a bottle of water. The presiding official takes a spoonful of Vaseline from his own bottle and mixes it into the congregant's bottle. The same procedure is carried out with water. The belief is that in the name of Shembe, the Vaseline and water now possess curative powers to heal the individual of his or her infirmity. The presiding official (minister, evangelist, or preacher) mediates power and authority from Shembe to the congregant.

At the church headquarters in Ebuhleni, Vimbeni Shembe also conducts healing ceremonies, usually twice each day, apart from the regular service times. He sees members and visitors outside his cottage. As many as 200 to 300 people congregate outside his cottage at each session. Those who have come to solicit his assistance remain on their knees awaiting their turn to approach Vimbeni Shembe at his table. Shembe has two young women who collect the *nikela* offerings from the congregants. Each person mentions his or her need to Shembe, and he responds by saying, "God Bless You." For those who come with illnesses,

Shembe adds Vaseline or water to their bottles with instruction on its use. Healing for the amaNazaretha initiate is not confined to the physical. Financial stringency, economic hardship, fracture in relationships, and breakdown in communication with ancestors are not unrelated, and thus healing has to be holistic. It is Shembe who is believed to be the one empowered to bring about restoration, relief and satisfaction for the amaNazaretha adherent.

Interview with Vimbeni Shembe

On my first visit to the Shembe compound, we sought to meet with Vimbeni Shembe, but the senior ministers closest to Shembe would not allow us access to him. I subsequently returned in June 2000 and was able to meet with Vimbeni Shembe through an invitation granted through an attorney friend who was doing some legal work for Shembe.

On that cold winter's morning at the Ebuhleni compound, Shembe was seated at a table in the courtyard of his cottage. Some 200 people, on their knees, waited for the opportunity to share their grief, sorrows, and illnesses with him in the hope that their needs would be met. When we entered the courtyard, he beckoned us to come to the table, waving his hand. We assumed that we should also move toward him on our knees. However, Shembe asked us to walk over to his table. I was introduced to him by my attorney friend, and Shembe offered to see us after the lunch hour.

We returned after lunch, and a maid announced our arrival. Shembe met us at the front porch of his house. He stood inside the porch with a wrought iron fence separating us from him.[17] I told him that I had come to see him for two reasons: first, to seek his permission to conduct my field research at the amaNazaretha Church and second, to interview him. He granted my first request by stating that I was free to talk with any member of the church and also attend the worship services. To my second request he responded, "I have no time for an interview, but anything you need to know (pointing to one of his aides) he will tell you. He knows everything about the church and me." With that remark Shembe dismissed us, but not before I stretched out my hand to him. To my utter surprise he withdrew, taking a few steps back, and with a smile said, "God Bless You" without shaking my hand. I later learned that Shembe does not shake hands with the rank and file or ordinary people, as in their eyes he is believed to be God.

The aide, I later came to learn, was Rev. Sibisi whose main function in the church is to ensure that before Shembe visits a temple or goes to a worship site, the infrastructure is set in place and that Shembe's personal needs are met. Sibisi was very responsive to my questions and assisted me in networking with other ministers and church officials.

In 2002 I spent five months in South Africa doing field research. One of my goals was to interview Vimbeni Shembe himself. The opportunity to achieve this goal came about when Minister Mpanza informed me that he had spoken to Vimbeni Shembe and that Shembe was willing to grant me the interview. Upon

Minister Mpanza's advice, I had prepared two sets of interview questions, a long version (the original) and a shortened version, in the event that Shembe only offered me a limited amount of time.

On the day I was supposed to have the interview, a group of ministers who heard that I had secured the interview with Shembe called me to a meeting with them. They did not want me to interview Vimbeni Shembe, and their argument was that I had interviewed all of them and that Shembe would not have anything different or more to offer me. I sensed that the underlying issue was that I had not consulted with them before securing the interview with Shembe. Nonetheless, I left South Africa after urging my contact, Minister Mpanza, to pursue my request with Vimbeni Shembe, and that I would make a special trip to South Africa to see him.

This opportunity presented itself in January 2003, the month when the amaNazaretha meet on Nghlangakasi Mountain for the Firstfruits Celebration. My appointment with Vimbeni Shembe was scheduled for 10:00 a.m. on a Tuesday morning. We arrived at Ebuhleni at approximately 9:45 a.m. only to find that in the courtyard Shembe was surrounded by hundreds of people waiting on bended knees for him to attend to their many diverse needs. He informed us that he would only be able to see us later that day. We returned, and he invited us into his house. Minister Mpanza and I were on our knees in Shembe's living room while he was seated on an exquisite brown leather couch. I again reminded him that he had invited me to come to interview him. I stressed the fact that I had spent much

money and time just to return to South Africa to interview him. He asked me if I had a questionnaire. When I responded in the affirmative, he asked for a copy of the interview schedule. He promised to answer the questions and that I should return the following week to see him again.

We returned to Ebuhleni the following Tuesday. Again Vimbeni Shembe appeared, surrounded by a sea of people, all waiting with keen anticipation for him to speak a word of encouragement to them. When he recognized our presence, he came over to where we were kneeling and said, "I have answered all your questions. But as you can see I am so busy. Could you come back later?" I had learned that to be persistent was the best way to achieve my goal, so I asked rather confidently, "What time would you like for us to return?" He responded that we should return at 3:00 p.m. that same afternoon.

We returned earlier than the appointed time and waited for Shembe to grant us an audience. At 3:30 p.m. the maid in attendance invited us to enter Vimbeni Shembe's living room. This time he invited me to sit beside him on the couch while Minister Mpanza remained on his knees. Vimbeni Shembe handed me a manila envelope that contained a neatly typed document with all the questions answered. I quickly checked some of his responses because I knew that he would not allow me much more than ten minutes of his time. By this time Minister Mpanza seated on the floor began nudging me to ask some questions. My conversation with Vimbeni Shembe was rather brief. I raised some questions (**Bold**) and his responses follow (normal text):

How did you receive your calling to be leader of this great movement?
Only Isaiah Shembe was appointed by God on the mountain Nghlangakasi. The word of God sent him all over Zulu Natal preaching the word of God and...ehhh...God showed him the holy mountain Nghlangakasi where God gave him all the ways to run this church. He was just a...alone...and he appointed his son Bishop J.G. Shembe after him...and said when he passes away the younger son Bishop AK Shembe will lead the church. And my father appointed me to lead the church.

I have spoken to many ministers and lay people who have been in the church for a long time and they have been kind to answer all my questions. One of the things I wanted to know is this: they tell me that Shembe is the Holy Spirit. How do you explain that? What does it mean to you?
We believe that, because God appointed him as the leader of the church. And he was given all the powers and he prayed for the people who are sick and they get help and that is how we took Shembe as the blessed name.

Now if I may ask you, is it only the leaders that can possess the Holy Spirit or I as a person...well what I was told was that when Jesus left he promised in the Word, John chapter 14:16 that he would send the Comforter the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit is Shembe now.
We think so but we do not know...everything is known by God. We only think that it is like that, but God knows everything.

Now can Rev Mpanza have the Holy Spirit?
Yes, God can do that. God can give that person power.

But right now he does not possess that power because it resides in one individual.
YES. God can turn it. It is his power.

But two people cannot have the Holy Spirit at the same time?
No, NO... it follows one after the other....

One question about ancestors: How important are they to you as an individual?
We send our ancestors to the Almighty God whenever we pray. We believe in that.

Do they assist you in any way?
We pray sending them to the Almighty and we get answers and in that way we feel they help us.

Can you do anything for them?
No, No, No, because they are in the world to come… they are not living in this world….

I have been told that people can come to the leader and if the ancestor has come to an individual in a dream and said that they are in a bad place and they want to be removed from there…they can come and make offerings for the ancestor and that ancestor can be removed from what they call "jail" and be reunited with the other ancestors…
We do that by prayer…asking the Almighty to take them out of that bad place and ….

How would one know that they have been removed from there and come to be reunited with the other ancestors?
That dream comes back again…a return dream.

Now I have been told by your theologians and especially Evangelist Mpanza who has written much on the church…He said "the Shembe movement is not a Christian Church because the traditional religions, and Zulu traditions are important, The Old Testament and you take the teachings from the Old Testament and even the ethical teachings of Jesus…so bringing that together this is a new Religious movement that started in 1906/7 and officially in 1913/14.
Yes, we are not Christians….We are Nazarenes… but we do follow the advices given by Christ…some of them are written in the Bible. We respect Christ….

But he does not have any significant role because he has come and gone?
Yes, that is correct, but we respect him.

When people come for healing, they say, I came to Baba, made an offering and Baba said "God bless you" and a miracle followed, so one of the questions I ask is, "Who heals?" Does Baba heal, or does God work through him to heal or is it Jesus Christ… Every time I have been told that God who heals through you….
Yes, that is correct.

So it is not Jesus Christ?
No.

I also ask about the Vaseline and water?
When you put your finger into the Vaseline it is only a means to enhance their faith and it is not the Vaseline that heals but it is their faith….
Yes, that is correct—it is their faith and prayer….

Is the church only for Africans?
It is a church for anyone.

The bumper sticker "Shembe is the way" what does it mean
They like Shembe and they like to follow him…that is the way to go….

Many people said that it means Shembe is the way to heaven?
Yes, we believe that is so.

I would like for you to tell us your story of how you came to be the leader of the church…I am told that when you were elected as leader, people saw a rainbow over your head and this told them that you received the Holy Spirit to lead the church….
Yes, (pointing to Minister Mpanza) they can tell you about this; I did not see the rainbow…they saw it….

Just as when Jesus was baptized, people saw the dove appearing and the voice of God saying, this is my believed son in whom I am well pleased"
That is correct and I believe that that is true.

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me.

We shook hands and took some pictures. I gave him a personal monetary gift before I left his presence. Perhaps Vimbeni Shembe saw the gift as *nikela*, an offering to the church.

Vimbeni Shembe, who trained to be a school teacher but never actually taught a class, herded his father's cattle before coming into the church leadership. He had no theological training, and it is possible that this lack precludes him from addressing theological matters in the church. Vimbeni Shembe's response to the interview schedule is given in its entirety as this is one means of comparing his views regarding the beliefs and practices in the amaNazaretha Church with those of the lesser leaders and members.[18] Vimbeni Shembe's responses to the questions in the interview schedule are contained in Appendix 3.

Summary

Participant observation at the amaNazaretha Church services afforded me the opportunity to take part in the Sabbath services at various temples during my field research. To obtain data to solve the research problem, I listened to and recorded sermons, songs, and prayers and observed healing ceremonies. Finally, I had the privilege of interviewing Vimbeni Shembe after several disappointing attempts.

The data collected from those interviewed and from my observation demonstrates that the amaNazaretha Church uses the Bible with an emphasis on the Old Testament, and their liturgical song book (mostly composed by Isaiah Shembe) in their Sabbath services. As noted above, Isaiah Shembe also functions as the authoritative Word along side the biblical text. The Bible becomes secondary in the light of the words and works of Isaiah Shembe and the succeeding leaders. Consequently, very little room is allowed for the person and work of Christ in the sermons.

In the prayers I recorded, it is evident that all prayers are offered to the Supreme Being, God. However, prayers are mediated in the name of ancestors and Shembe. In some instances the prayers are made directly to Shembe. As I discovered in my interviews, *Shembe* is more than a name, more than a physical person; Shembe represents or *is* the Holy Spirit. Thus, praying to God is likened to praying to Shembe. The hymns have an emphasis on Jehovah, God, and in some instances Jesus Christ (as I shall point out in Chapter 7) and are psalmodic in

nature. I have stated above that Shembe is central in the healing process, whether he personally conducts the ceremony or delegates the duty to other officials. In Chapter 7, I offer my evaluation of the theology and Christology evident in the amaNazaretha Church.

Notes

[1] In Chapter 1, I first introduce the annual gatherings at Ebuhleni and Nghlangakasi.

[2] Fasting, in the context of the July celebration for the amaNazaretha Church, requires the initiate to abstain from sexual relations, and maintain a restricted diet where leaven is excluded. Members are required to keep this fast for the whole month of July.

[3] The full Sabbath liturgy, translated in English appears later in this chapter.

[4] The temple is the separated religious space created by the amaNazaretha Church where members gather weekly to worship together.

[5] The term "tabernacle" is not used by amaNazaretha worshippers. They do not have a name for the building. However, in my conversation with Evangelist Mpanza, he assured me that my term "tabernacle" accurately represents the building, its structure and symbols.

[6] A set of two microphones were brought into the tabernacle with the symbols previously mentioned. The microphones and their tripod stands were also wrapped in grass prayer mats when brought into the tabernacle.

[7] From my interviews, I gather that the pillow was used by Isaiah Shembe. Adherents believe that Isaiah is present in spirit at their worship services. Some interviewees believe that the pillow is representative of the Holy Spirit, interpreted to be Shembe himself.

[8] I discuss the prayers in my research findings later in this chapter.

[9] The data extrapolated from the sermons appear later in this chapter below.

[10] *Nikela* is a ceremony where worshippers have the opportunity to bring an offering to the church when requests are made for healing and for family need. Members also bring offerings when the church is in needs of financial resources for specified church projects. *Nikela* is also an offering-ceremony one makes on behalf of ones ancestors. The belief is that ancestors appear in dreams, requesting assistance from living relatives. In this instance members purchase a ticket of release for the ancestor from the church office and approach Shembe who mediates on behalf of the "troubled" ancestor.

[11] A member of the church presented me with a copy of the hymnal and encouraged me to purchase a cover for the book. I have my copy of the book and on the cellophane jacket I have a picture of Vimbeni Shembe and myself outside his residence at Ebuhleni compound.

[12] Bongani Mthethwa was the son-in-law of J.G. Shembe. Prior to his murder by unknown assailants he was the church's chief organist. He studied music at Natal University where he obtained his B.A. in music. At the time of his death, he was writing a Master's thesis at the University of Natal.

[13] See appendix 4 for the liturgy, a translation done by Bongani Mthethwa and edited by Carol Muller. Hans Jurgen Becken also completed a translation of the hymnal, "Nazarene's Hymns with Sabbath Liturgy and Morning and Evening Prayers (n. d.)

[14] I evaluate the sermons in the next chapter.

[15] See Chapter 4: The amaNazaretha Church of Isaiah Shembe and its leaders.

[16] I evaluate the prayers in the Chapter 7.

[17] See Picture Plate 1.

[18] It is my contention that the responses were written by one of Shembe's aides. While I have some inkling as to who the person might be, it is not appropriate to make that disclosure in this dissertation. I make this claim on the basis of the responses in the interview schedule, which appear to be carefully articulated in terms of content, as compared with the tentative responses I received from my personal interview with Vimbeni Shembe. One of my informants advised me that I should not expect Vimbeni Shembe to "say much, as he is a shy person."

Plate 1: A young worshipper preparing for the Sabbath service

Chapter 7

Theology and Christology in the amaNazaretha Church

The burden of this dissertation has been to discover if the amaNazaretha Church is a Christward movement. In Chapter 1 I defined a Christward movement as one that recognizes that "Jesus is Lord." The amaNazaretha Church could be considered a Christward movement *if* it affirms, "Jesus is Lord," in the sense that adherents of the Christian faith acknowledge and receive the person and work of Christ on the basis of the past (his work of atonement), present (his mediatorial role and intercession on our behalf), and future (his second coming in glory as our hope).

So as to discover the Christology espoused by the amaNazaretha, this study considered the extent to which the church positions the leader, Vimbeni Shembe, and ancestors as mediators between the living and the Supreme Being. Through interviews and participant observation, I learned that Vimbeni Shembe and ancestors still occupy a significant place in the everyday lives of AmaNazaretha members. Consequently, there is little or no room for the central role of the person and work of Jesus Christ in the lives of amaNazaretha adherents. It is to these results that I now direct the study for further analysis and reflection. We will first look at the status and role of Shembe, then the Ancestors, and finally Christ in the life of the amaNazaretha Church.

The Status and Role of Shembe in the amaNazaretha Church and the Question of Jesus Christ as Mediator

The importance of the subject of Christology in the African context cannot be overestimated. It is more than a truism to say that "the concept of ancestors is as popular among traditional Africans south of the Sahara, as the name of Jesus Christ in the Church in Africa" (Muzorewa 1988:255). Muzorewa adds, "...Christian Church membership is growing like wildfire...it is growing faster than the development of African theology" (1988:255). Perhaps, herein lies one of the clues as to why members of the amaNazaretha Church hold to non-orthodox views regarding Christology (the person and work of Christ), pneumatology (the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people and in the world), and the Holy Trinity. With the rapid proliferation of the amaNazaretha Church beyond the province of Kwa Zulu Natal and even to neighboring African countries, discipleship and training has not kept pace with the growth of the church. However, of primary importance as I have discerned, is the lack of a clear articulation of the basic tenets of the Christian faith, specifically the doctrine of God, Christ, and the Holy Trinity.

Responses to Research Questions

To ascertain the place of Jesus Christ in the amaNazaretha beliefs and practices I proposed three questions that invited interviewees to compare the position Vimbeni occupies in the amaNazaretha Church to that of Christ. The questions I posed were: 1) *Would there be a time when you would talk with*

Vimbeni Shembe and Christ in the same conversation or prayer? 2) *How would your words be different when you talk with Christ or Shembe?* and 3) *How is Vimbeni Shembe related to Christ; does he possess the Spirit of Christ or is he the Christ?* As my research has shown (Chapter 5), the majority of respondents affirmed Vimbeni Shembe at the expense of Jesus Christ in that Jesus Christ does not feature prominently in their prayers. Others suggested that Vimbeni and Christ are equal in status, arguing that Jesus, before he departed, promised that he would send the Holy Spirit, who, the amaNazaretha believe, is Shembe.[1] The mediatorial role of Shembe is discerned in the prayers offered by amaNazaretha members, both formally and informally.

Prayers in the amaNazaretha Church

With regards to prayer, amaNazaretha ministers' and members' unanimous claim was that they prayed in the name of Shembe. As participant observer I recorded several prayers offered during the amaNazaretha Sabbath services that substantiate this claim. For example, one congregant in his prayer said,

> Father, God who has all power, we are in your face this evening, we thank you for keeping us on the way we have been; you have protected us. We ask for your love which has no end to be with us this night; *in the name of Shembe Amen* [emphasis mine]. (Congregant: 2002)

Two observations are in order here. First, the worshipper's prayer was directed to God; he affirms that blessings and protection ultimately issue from the hand of God.[2] Second, such blessings and protection, while proceeding from God, are mediated through Shembe. I have already argued that for the Zulu, God is

acknowledged as the ultimate Supreme Being—culturally, that the Supreme Being is at the apex of the hierarchy and then there are a series of mediators in the persons of ancestors that arbitrate between the Supreme Being and the living. For the amaNazaretha, the Supreme Being is the God of the Old Testament, Jehovah whom they worship. Yet, this Supreme Being cannot be approached directly by mere humans and thus an intermediary is necessary. In this instance the intermediary is Shembe, who approaches God on behalf of the amaNazaretha adherents.

The theory I use to evaluate the amaNazaretha prayers is the model suggested by Shorter (1975:9). In terms of Shorter's typology,[3] my research shows that amaNazaretha prayers are directed to God, the Supreme Being, but through Shembe thus interfacing with what Shorter calls symmetrical mediation. The figure below demonstrates this model of prayer:

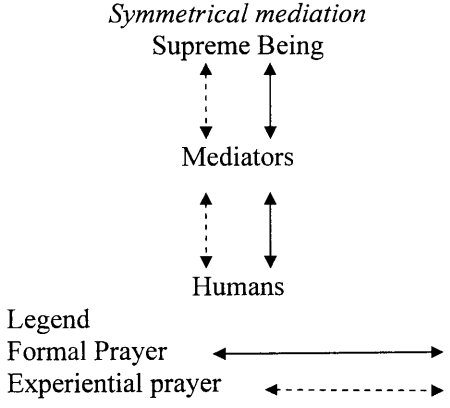

Figure 9. Symmetrical Mediation (after Shorter 1975:10-11).

My second frame of reference to evaluate amaNazaretha prayers is Hexham's work, *Scriptures of the AmaNazaretha of Ekuphakameni* (1994), which contains the prayers and writings of Isaiah Shembe, the founder of the amaNazaretha Church. I quote two excerpts of Isaiah Shembe's prayers to show how Isaiah Shembe first prays in the name of ancestors and second that he believes himself to be mediator between his people and God, Jehovah. The first is the prayer he offered at Ekuphakameni for the forgiveness of sins. One excerpt of the prayer reads thus:

> My prayer Nkosi that I pray when I am alone
> In the corners of my heart,
> Which no one knows about,
> Which I do not pronounce with my mouth
> May it come to you Thixo of our fathers:
> Let nothing hinder it on the paths along which my prayers travel,
> When they come to you [NKulunKulu of Dingane and Senzangakhona][4]
>
> Hope of all hopes.
> May I be accepted and rejected before your face Father.
> What will become of me.
> There is no other NKulunKulu
> To whom I can call and who would respond except you. (1994:61)

The above prayer suggests that Isaiah Shembe articulates his heart's desires directly to God (NKulunKulu, Thixo) asking God that nothing should hinder his prayer from reaching God and more than what his mouth utters that God would cleanse his heart. The prayer also reveals that Isaiah Shembe was conscious of the mediatory role his ancestors played culturally in communicating with the Supreme Being. This role becomes evident in the prayer when he says, "May it come to you Thixo[5] of our fathers," and also his reference to "NkulunKulu of Dingane and

Senzagakhona." Here he makes reference to the hidden things within the sanctum of his own heart that may be revealed to God through the ancestors. In these instances it would appear that Isaiah Shembe, although calling on the God of the Old Testament, fuses his prayer with the Zulu traditional approach when he calls on God through the ancestors. I will comment further on this phenomenon at the end of this chapter.

The prayer by Isaiah Shembe below was offered at Zibone[6] in 1927. In this prayer Isaiah Shembe articulates his belief that God is transcendent and consequently cannot be understood by mortal humans. Shembe thus appeals to God, asking that he (Shembe) be the people's representative to God and also mediate God's presence to the people. Isaiah Shembe prays,

> Jehovah be you my friend. If I call you do not hide yourself from my calling you. You called me with your voice and with your glory. Because you did not hide yourself from me the nations are murmuring about you. Because you did not hide yourself from your slave many Nations have feared your name, because of the wonders and the signs that you have performed through me today Nkosi Jehovah.
> I have extended the length of my heart to you in my prayers for the sake of your name.
> So that which is good to you Jehovah may come to your Servant because you have called him. It is my prayer that you be as you are in the presence of the Nations.
> You are a myth and yet you exist, Jehovah. You are terribly beyond what is terrifying. You may be understood by no man. The thousands of your being NkulunKulu cannot be understood. There is none among those born of man and woman under the sun who may pray to you, Nkosi Jehovah. You appoint your own times according to your own consent during which you may be praised so that it may be pleasure in your heart.
> ...Write Nkosi Jehovah on the tablets of the heart of your slave Shembe, the times when he may praise you: times that you have appointed. That it may become a sweet odour to you Nkosi Jehovah. Like the odour of the

> incense that was burnt by your servant Moses and Aaron on your altars (Numbers 16:41-46). (1994:102)

Isaiah Shembe prayed this prayer in the latter part of his ministry (he died in 1935). A brief analysis of this prayer reveals that Isaiah Shembe appeals to his calling, that God called him through an audible voice and amidst God's glory.[7] The prayer goes on to affirm that God revealed God's will for the nations through Isaiah Shembe when the nation experienced "signs and wonders." Isaiah Shembe was speaking in the context of a troubled South Africa where political strife, the negative effects of colonialism, the consequent economic hardship, and fracturing of Zulu society was taking its toll on his people. He prays reminding God that God had specifically chosen him, Shembe, for times like these. He goes on to suggest that since God's transcendence disqualifies mere mortals from approaching the Supreme Being, Shembe offers himself as the intermediary, just as Moses functioned between God and the people of Israel in the wilderness.[8] God's transcendence is one explanation why adherents of the amaNazaretha Church today pray in the name of Shembe. Isaiah Shembe's prayers are models and teaching tools that people have passed on from Isaiah's generation to this day. It is Shembe who acts as mediator for the Zulu person when she or he prays to God. However, the prayers offered by the current leader, Vimbeni Shembe, add to the complexity as to who mediates the amaNazaretha prayers since Vimbeni calls on both his forefathers and Shembe, who is both his ancestor and (in the belief of the amaNazaretha) the Holy Spirit.

Vimbeni Shembe prayed this prayer at the conclusion of one of the Sabbath services:

> God of our forefathers, we thank you for the day you gave us. We ask you to give us more days, we thank you for good things you do for us. We ask you to give us courage to do the good things for you. All this we ask in the name of Shembe. Amen. (July 2002)

I note two observations from this prayer that show a double mediatorial role--ancestors and Shembe. First, Vimbeni Shembe begins his prayer in the name of his ancestors--forefathers. I have thus far shown that this is consistent with the prayers by members of the amaNazaretha Church generally and also that Isaiah Shembe's recorded prayers (Hexham 1994) reveal a similar characteristic. (I discuss the ancestors' mediatorial role in prayer in greater detail below in this chapter.) Second, Vimbeni Shembe concludes his prayer with the words "in the name of Shembe." One explanation for this addendum to his prayer comes from his response to my questions in the interview schedule, first, "How would you differentiate between Shembe as ancestor and God?" Vimbeni Shembe's written response to the question was

> There is always the confusion arising out of the ambiguity in the name of Shembe because even before one renders that Shembe is a particular surname, the Holy Spirit that resided in Shembe was also called Shembe. In so far as the Holy Spirit being called Shembe, there is no difference between it [Holy Spirit] and God; taking into account also that God is said to be a Trinity (Father Son, Holy Spirit).[9] (Shembe: Interview Schedule Chapter 6 above)

Second, to my specific question on prayer, "Would there be a time when you would talk with Shembe and Christ in the same conversation or prayer? Explain," he offered this response:

> Refer to hymn 58 of *Izihlabelelo zamaNazaretha.* Yes, the same Holy Spirit at a certain point in time was Jesus, to the Jews; Mohammed to the Islams [Muslims]; Confucius to the Chinese; Buddha to the Indians and Shembe to the Africans. The same Holy Spirit is called by different names in different peoples of the world.

Further, when asked, "When you pray do you pray to Shembe or Christ?," Vimbeni Shembe responded, "We pray to Shembe the Holy Spirit that was in Christ through the form of a dove that descended on him during baptism in the Jordan River."

While I will comment on the belief that Shembe is *the* Holy Spirit or that he *possesses* the Holy Spirit later in this chapter, the above responses show that the amaNazaretha, including Vimbeni Shembe, believe that their prayers are mediated through Shembe the Holy Spirit and not through Jesus Christ. My research has already discerned that the amaNazaretha do not differentiate between the Shembes as they believe that the Holy Spirit which resided in Jesus Christ was transferred to Shembe upon the ascension of Jesus and then to his successors. As the interview has shown, Jesus has no relevance for the amaNazaretha today as he came to earth at a specific point in history for a specific group of people, the Jews.

There is precedent for the belief that Jesus reincarnated in other religious traditions as well and that it is not only a cultural phenomenon but that it transcends culture. Snyder offers one example from the life and times of the Chinese revolutionary leader Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864) where, after his conversion to Christianity, he "later saw himself as God's special emissary, a sort of second Christ, sent by God to establish *Taiping Tienkuo*, the 'Heavenly Kingdom of Eternal Peace and

Prosperity'" (1991:94). Like Isaiah Shembe, who claimed to have received divine revelations from God, Hong Xiuquan also received visions of God:

> he saw a venerable old man and his middle-aged son and received a commission to rid the world of demon worship...He identified the old man...with God the Father and the son as Jesus Christ. Hong thereafter saw himself as the Younger Brother of Jesus, sent to earth to establish God's kingdom. (1991:95)

Another example from history, that shows how religious movements begin with mere mortals who claim divine revelations and thus gain a following, is the rise of the Shaking Quakers. Ann Lee is credited with bringing the Shaker Movement to the United States of America. She claimed to have received visions and heard voices as a child. However, the definitive breakthrough and God's calling came when she was 34 in 1770, when Shakerism began. Her mystical visitations brought her to believe that she was the female Christ (Campion 1976:39). Her visions brought her to believe that in the second coming Jesus would appear as a woman. Her conviction was that God was both male and female. When arrested and put in prison for her extreme views and teachings, she had a divine revelation in which "she saw the Lord Jesus Christ in his glory" (1976:41). She went on to claim that

> Jesus revealed to her that she [author's emphasis] was his anointed successor on earth. He told her she must carry his Truth to the world and promised her divine protection. Henceforth, she was to be the incarnation of the word of God, the second coming of *Christ as a woman* [author's emphasis]. (1976:41)

The above two illustrations suggest, at least, that Isaiah Shembe and his successors share similar experiences with others in religious history and that to arrive at a state of apotheosis is not uncommon, nor is it limited to certain cultures. My conclusions regarding mediation in prayers are based on two theories I have used in this study. The first is Shorter's (1975) taxonomy of symmetrical prayer where mediators act reciprocally between the Supreme Being and people is evident in worship and prayer in the amaNazaretha Church. Shembe's mediation is imperative in the light of God's transcendence and lack of direct involvement in the worship experience of the amaNazaretha.

The second is Hexham's work (1994) on the prayers of Isaiah Shembe, which points to Shembe's mediatorial role. Shembe pleads his people's cause in the presence of God, not unlike the way Moses did in the Old Testament. I propose that Isaiah Shembe, thoroughly immersed in the Old Testament tradition and taking on the likeness of Moses as mediator, and also acting culturally in a kingship role, the Zulu King or chief—"links his nation with the supernatural forces" (Oosthuizen 1994:33) as Moses did for Israel. Here Zulu tradition and Old Testament paradigms coalesce to produce a mediator that usurps the place and the work of Christ. Shembe in one sense parallels the position and work of Moses in the Old Testament. One example is the function of mediation. Exodus 20:18-21 reads thus:

> When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But

> do not have God speak to us or we will die." Moses said to the people, Do not be afraid, God has come to test you, so that the fear of the God will be with you to keep you from sinning. The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

It is clear from the passage that Moses' sacerdotal and prophetic role between the people and God is established. God speaks through Moses to the people and Moses approaches God on their behalf. Isaiah Shembe also functioned in a similar role as we have noted in his prayers. He is also the giver of the law for the amaNazaretha, when we consider the liturgical reading morning and evening prayers and also the Sabbath liturgical.[10] Shembe sets out the rules and regulations in accordance with the Ten Commandments and also the Levitical laws of the Old Testament to which the amaNazaretha Church must conform. In this respect Shembe is likened to the Moses in the Old Testament in the role of mediator and one who pronounces God's laws to the people.

Christians, however, pray in the name of Jesus. That Christ mediates the Christian's prayer is replete in Scripture, especially in the Gospels. For example, in the fourth Gospel Jesus invites his disciples to make requests in his name. Two clear references to asking "in my name" in John's Gospel are John 14:13-14 where Jesus says, "Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name I will do it," and John 16:24, where Jesus says, "Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full." Leon Morris (1971:646-647) commenting on

the importance of prayer "in Jesus name," says that the name of Jesus should not be used as a mere formula. He adds,

> it is prayer proceeding from faith in Christ, prayer that gives expression to a unity with all that Christ stands for, prayer which seeks to set forward Christ Himself...We should not overlook the importance of the fact that Christ says He Himself will answer prayer. (1971:646)

The older manuscripts citing verse 14 as "if you shall ask [*me*] anything in my name..." suggest that Jesus was specific that prayer should be made in his name and, further, that he himself will answer (1971:647).

In the second verse (John 16:24), the question of Christ's mediation comes to the fore as Jesus reminds his disciples that in the pre-resurrection era they either asked Jesus or the Father directly. Now Jesus, in the post-resurrection era, affirms that they are at liberty to ask anything of the Father. However, this asking is through the Son (1971:708). Jesus' finished work (his death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father) qualifies him as mediator.

In the Christian understanding of the words and works of Jesus in regards to prayer, it is Christ who mediates between people and God. The Christian belief in one mediator thus precludes all other mediators. Therefore praying "in the name of Shembe" disqualifies the amaNazarethas' prayers as being part of the Christian tradition. This aspect of the amaNazaretha Church's beliefs and practices places them outside of orthodox Christianity. I will later suggest where I place the amaNazaretha Church in terms of a religious affiliation outside of Christianity (Chapter 8).

Healing

When I raised the question, "Who is a more powerful healer, Shembe or Christ? When you or a member of your family is ill who do you go to for healing?" both ministers and members overwhelmingly responded that Shembe heals, and when calamity strikes they call on Shembe.

In my conversation with an elderly woman in a rural amaNazaretha congregation, I raised the question about healing by telling the story of Jesus healing the blind man in the miracle recorded in John 9.[11] John reports in specific detail the means by which Jesus heals the blind man and also comments on the man's faith when Jesus commands him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. Morris in his commentary notes that in curing the man, "He chooses to do this by making clay of His spittle, putting it on the man's eyes and bidding him wash it off. Questions arise, like "Why clay?" "Why spittle?" "Why wash in Siloam?" (1971:480). In the ancient world it is known that curative powers were attributed to saliva (1971:480). While the man's faith may have been enhanced by this act, it is Jesus who heals him by this method although he was not confined to it.

My interviewee responded by saying that for her it is Shembe who heals. She went on to describe Shembe's way of procuring healing. Shembe said, "God bless you" and then gave her Vaseline and water. She explained that Shembe places his finger in the bottle of Vaseline, and when she applies the Vaseline to her body, she is healed. The woman said she had suffered from abdominal problems for some time, and when she had drunk the water that Shembe gave her, she was

relieved of her illness. She went on to say that when she prayed in the name of Shembe, she would also experience healing. When I raised the question as to why she did not pray directly to God, she responded, "Only Shembe knows God."

Another story that suggests healing powers are transferred from the founding leader Isaiah Shembe to his successors is evident in the testimony told by one minister in the church. He claimed that he had died in a train accident and his body was sent to the local hospital mortuary. However, the mortuary could not accommodate more bodies, and so the corpse was left overnight on a gurney. The minister said,

> In September 1, 1973, there was a train accident at Mondani I died at 9:00 a.m. At 3:00 p.m. the next day J.G. Shembe came and woke me up. Shembe said to me "I want you to go back to your physical life because I want you to be a minister." There was a paper written that I was dead [death certificate]. Even the newspaper reported that I was dead. When J.G. Shembe came he was carrying the book and opened it. He read from the book my name. I then woke up in my physical body. (MR:2)

This miracle testimony given by the minister took place in the tenure of J. G. Shembe, the immediate successor to Isaiah Shembe. I then asked the minister if Vimbeni Shembe possessed similar healing powers. When asked how Vimbeni Shembe heals, the minister responded that Vimbeni Shembe used the words "God bless you," and said that he sometimes uses Vaseline and water. The minister explained that Vaseline was also used in Bible times. He referred me to the book of James where we are encouraged to anoint the sick with oil.[12] The minister believed that healing in Shembe's name was possible because it is Shembe who communicates with God on behalf of people.

In the light of God's transcendence and in a sense, to the Zulu amaNazaretha adherent, his absence, it becomes clear why

> God is in the background while Shembe himself takes precedence, maintaining that the Zulus were once told of a God who cannot see.... "But Isaiah Shembe showed you a God who walks on feet and who heals with his hands, and who can be known by men, a God who loves and who has compassion." Isaiah Shembe brought the distant God into their midst. (Oosthuizen 1968a:7)

From the above testimonies and my research findings, I conclude that it is Shembe who mediates healing for the amaNazaretha follower. Jesus plays no part in the healing rituals in the church. The amaNazaretha believe that the power to heal invested in Isaiah Shembe now resides in the present leader Vimbeni Shembe. The use of water, Vaseline, and other aids such as soap are a carry-over from Zulu traditional and cultural beliefs fused with biblical methods of healing, such as Jesus' miraculous healing of the blind man in John 9.

Sabbath Services

During my field research I observed the amaNazaretha Church worship services convened at the church's epicenter, Ebuhleni, in the province of Kwa Zulu Natal. I recorded sermons and noted the hymns sung in the services. These observations assisted me in bringing the amaNazaretha adherents' beliefs (as articulated in interviews) and practices (what they did in their services) into one consistent whole.

Hymns and Sermons

I had anticipated that the hymns that I recorded at the amaNazaretha Church

Sabbath Services would tell me more about the role of Jesus Christ in the church and especially in the worship experience of the members. However, all of the hymns sung during my visits to the Sabbath services did not relate to the person and work of Christ. Rather, they related more to the consciousness of the members regarding Isaiah Shembe, his work, and the reasons for gathering at Ekuphakameni. Ancestors also featured in many of the hymns. For example, in hymn 184, Isaiah Shembe states,

> They have been called out of their graves;
> They are already out, we have seen them,
> They have entered the holy city
> May Jehova be praised. (1940:184)

This one stanza refers to the ancestors who are invited to join the living community at the amaNazaretha worship center. Isaiah Shembe is present as head and leader of both the living dead and the worshippers (Oosthuizen 1994:35).

From my analysis of the sermons I draw the following conclusions. First, the content of the sermons reveals that ethical issues, Sabbath observances, and motivation for upright and exemplary living dominate the preachers' messages. Stories relating to the deeds of Isaiah Shembe, J. G. Shembe, and Amos Shembe are introduced into the sermon content even though the text bears no relevance to such stories. On some occasions, a biblical text was not used at any time in the sermon delivery. I noted that stories relating to Isaiah Shembe dominated the sermons more than any other topic.

In this regard my observation was that Shembe became the primary source of the sermon exposition, and the biblical text took second place. Thus, in the amaNazaretha Church, the words and deeds of Shembe (Isaiah, J. G., Amos, and Vimbeni) function as the enscripturated word. In other words, the words and works of Shembe are regarded as authoritative and form the narrative which preachers recall from memory. In speaking of memory as a moral exercise for Christian ethics, Stanley Hauerwas speaks of the coalescence of Scripture and personal story. This kind of fusion of biblical and personal story is evident in the AmaNazaretha preaching. Hauerwas contends that

> To remember, we require not only historical-critical skills, but examples of people whose lives have been formed by that memory. The authority of Scripture is mediated through the lives of the saints identified by our community as most representing what we are about. (1983:70)

For the amaNazaretha Church, telling stories about Shembe motivates the believers to live after the example of their leaders, so much so that the person and work of Jesus Christ recedes into the background. Evangelist Mpanza in a group discussion reminded me that while the amaNazaretha accept the Old and the New Testament teachings, the Jews do not relate to the New Testament. Thus, if the amaNazaretha Church were to produce a third testament, it would not be accepted by the Christians. He believed that Shembe's words and works are authoritative beyond the Christian canon of Scripture because Jesus promised that Shembe the Holy Spirit would follow him.

One of the theories I use to evaluate Shembe's sermons is Loubser's (1993) *The Oral Christ of Shembe: Believing in Jesus in Oral and Literate Societies.* Loubser argues for an implicit Christology operating in the amaNazaretha Church on the basis of his analysis of some sermons preached in the early 1990s. Loubser says, "The implicit soteriological significance of the founder-evangelist, Isaiah Shembe, becomes clear when considering the christological language in which his deeds are narrated" (1993:72). For example, among others, Loubser cites stories narrated in the Shembe preaching about Shembe's birth that resemble the birth of Jesus and John the Baptist (1993:72). In a similar vein, he shows how, through the sermons, Shembe's preachers fuse stories regarding Shembe's birth, early life, and calling with that of the biblical narratives of Christ. The result is that oral listeners see Shembe as the one who succeeds Jesus, or at best that both are equal. While Loubser is sympathetic in his evaluation of the amaNazaretha theology, he does raise open-ended questions regarding the role of Christ: "Does the Shembe Christ liberate man from sin by grace? Is He the ultimate statement of God's love, enabling humanity to live in hope, faith and love?" (1993:77). Loubser does not come to a firm conclusion regarding how salvation is effected in the amaNazaretha Church.

I conclude from my observation and study of the sermons delivered by the amaNazaretha preachers and Vimbeni Shembe, that foremost in the minds and hearts of the amaNazaretha congregants, when they come to worship on the Sabbath, is Shembe. Shembe's entrance into the worship arena, the "pillow

ceremony," the hymns sung, and the sermon preached all center around Shembe's words and works. In the many occasions that I participated in the worship services, the name of Jesus Christ was rarely mentioned. In such a setting the mediatorial role of Shembe cannot be missed when one participates in the Sabbath worship.

Shembe the Forgiver of Sins

My research findings in Chapter 5 demonstrate that the amaNazaretha adherents enjoy a reciprocal relationship with the living dead, their ancestors. Respondents (67 of 68) believed that their ancestors call on the living when they, the ancestors, are in need. One reason that obligated the living to respond to their ancestors' needs was that until the ancestor received assistance from the living, the ancestors were rendered helpless to intervene in the affairs of the living. Interviewees stated that since the ancestors were in "jail," the living should endeavor to extricate them from such a position. The process by which this liberation is achieved was that the living relative approached Shembe with an offering, *nikela*, and Shembe would then free the ancestor. Some respondents stated that they also had the option to purchase a "release ticket" from the church office. When the ticket was presented to Shembe, he would order the release of the ancestor. The concept of "jail" is likened to the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory in medieval times. Kuiper says,

> According to the Church at that time and the Roman Catholic Church today, purgatory is a place to which those who are to enter heaven are assigned for a period of cleansing by fire before they are fit for entrance.

> The more faithfully the believer went through the rites and ceremonies on earth, the shorter would be his time of suffering in purgatory. (1982:158)

For the amaNazaretha member there are several reasons why one's ancestor would be confined to purgatory, as my research findings show. Seeing as the ancestor was unable to make restitution for the wrongs committed while on earth, he or she has the option to call on the living to assist by making a payment of money for his or her release. In the Roman Catholic Church in medieval times such practice, the purchase of a papal ticket, an indulgence, was common (1982:159).

A close study of the system as is operative in the amaNazaretha Church shows that Shembe possesses power and authority to forgive sins of the dead. I earlier stated that Shembe is considered to be above the ancestors in the Zulu hierarchial structure of divinities. If Shembe has the power to forgive sins of the dead, my research has shown that according to the majority of interviewees, he also has the power to forgive sins of the living. Most interviewees, as the data indicates, also believed that since Shembe had the power to forgive sins he himself does not possess sin. Some interviewees suggested that Shembe perhaps did have sin before he became the leader of the church. It is at this point that members of the amaNazaretha Church would view Shembe as apotheosized.[13] From a biblical perspective Christians believe it is only through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and one's belief in the finished work of Christ that one receives salvation. Hence, in Shembe Christology, while the amaNazaretha accept the Incarnation of

Christ, there is "complete absence of any theology of the cross" (Loubser 1993:78). Thus, Shembe functions as mediator of salvation for the amaNazaretha.

The Status and Role of Ancestors in the amaNazaretha Church and the Question of Christ's Mediation

From my study of the literature (Chapter 1), on the status and role of ancestors in the Zulu cosmological structure, I learned that ancestors are intimately connected to the every day lives of their living descendents. This connection also became evident from the results of my interviews and participant observation (Chapters 5 and 6 above), where I again confirmed that ancestors do occupy a strategic place in the lives of the amaNazaretha, both in their cultural and religious beliefs and practices. I stated earlier that illness in the Zulu context cannot be defined too narrowly. In African culture generally and Zulu culture specifically, illness may be defined as the result of "a disturbance of the balance between man [humans] and spiritual or mystical forces" (M.V. Buhrmann 1989:30). The goal in such instances "is to restore the equilibrium" (1989:30). One recourse for the living is that they may approach the ancestors who both diagnose the problem and offer treatment toward a solution. Buhrmann confirms what my interviewees articulated when he states,

> To restore this balance, communication and communion with the Ancestors through the performance of rites, rituals, ceremonies and sacrifices are required. There is a large variety of such rites forming a complicated fabric of behavior, such as purification to protect against evil, ritual dances to stimulate body function and to invoke the participation of the Ancestors in their healing procedures. (1989:30)

In describing ancestors Buhrmann further articulates the sentiments expressed by many of the amaNazaretha I interviewed:

> The Ancestrors, the deceased forebears…are experienced as not visible, but very human and living with their kind in and around the homestead. The relationship is natural and usually friendly. They can feel cold, hungry, neglected, annoyed and happy. They are conceived of as being omnipresent and nearly omniscient and they normally function as wise guides and protectors, but when annoyed their roles can be reversed and they may either expose one to the power of witches or themselves cause all kinds of illness and misfortune. (1989:30)

When illness and disturbances do not receive any positive results from ancestors the living relatives consult traditional healers and diviners (*sangomas*) for assistance. In the Zulu tradition *sangomas* are believed to possess the necessary power to approach the ancestors to diagnose the patient's problem and prescribe the necessary treatment to alleviate the problem of their patients (Buhrmann 1989:31).

During research in August 2002, I was informed that one of J. G. Shembe's daughters assists people who need communication with their ancestors when their own efforts in that direction have proved futile. I was curious to witness this ritual. Through a friend of Shembe's daughter, I secured an appointment to visit her home, a few miles away from Ebuhleni. Upon our arrival we were requested to remove our shoes and wait for her. After two hours she emerged from her dwelling and proceeded to a hut especially prepared for receiving people who needed her assistance. The hut was sparsely furnished with a grass mat on the floor. However, in the hut a grass chair,[14] similar to the one Shembe occupies

during the Sabbath service at Ebuhleni, was conspicuously placed. Upon inquiry I was told that it was there representing the presence of Isaiah Shembe.

Joseph told me that her main function was to invoke the spirits of one's ancestors, and through them she would make prophetic utterances regarding the past, present, and future status of the individual. A man and two women had come to solicit her help. She appeared to fall into a trance-like state and seemed to be outside of her body, communicating with the spirits of the person's ancestors. In the trance she spoke in different voices, perhaps the voices of the ancestors. Some 15 minutes later she returned to her normal state and advised the person according to her communication with the ancestral spirit. Joseph was next in line to receive her attention. According to Joseph she had told him about some of the situations he was facing at that time. For example, he was intending to take a second wife and was told that the woman he intended taking was not the right person for him. She also told Joseph that the ancestors had inquired about the motor vehicle they had given him. Joseph told her that the vehicle had broken down. She told Joseph that the ancestors needed his help; therefore, he had to buy a white gown and a baptismal certificate for the ancestor so that the ancestor could join the church. Only when Joseph fulfilled the ancestor's request would he be in a position to assist him.

Joseph later informed me that apart from foretelling, one of the duties Shembe's sister performed was to cleanse the ancestors[15] so that they could be of benefit to their living descendants. This ceremony is carried out through the

payment of a sum of money and a ritual that frees the ancestor from an undesirable state to a position of acceptability among the ancestors. I was later informed by some ministers that this woman functioned as a *sangoma*,[16] and that both the office and the practice are forbidden by the church.[17]

While it is true that the church forbids its members from visiting the *sangoma*, they have indeed replaced the traditional *sangoma* with a functional substitute,[18] Shembe. It is Shembe who now mediates members' needs by approaching the ancestors on their behalf. In this regard, Whiteman's study of "form and meaning" is helpful. He reminds us that "cultural forms are important because of the meaning they convey, and not because there is any intrinsic value in them" (1983:435).

While it is important to bear in mind Hiebert's caution that in a crosscultural setting "the purpose is to understand old ways not judge them" through phenomenological study of the forms used in Zulu tradition and their attendant meaning (1994:89), it is Whiteman who cogently characterizes the nature of form and meaning. He says,

> One of the most important areas of culture that contributes to the problem of cross-cultural communication is the relationship between cultural forms and the meanings they convey. Cultural forms are the obvious, observable and audible parts of culture such as material artifacts, behavior, ceremonies, words, etc. and they are always culture specific. That is, they do not convey any universal meaning, but are related to a specific meaning which is determined by the cultural context in which they are employed. (1983:434)

While displaying zest for and commitment to the Old Testament biblical faith and Jewish practices, the amaNazaretha have not totally abandoned Zulu cultural beliefs and practices. This holding on to Zulu beliefs is evident in that they have identified a functional substitute for the office of the *sangoma.* My interviews and participant observation reveal that the amaNazaretha, in the absence of the *sangoma*, appeal to Vimbeni Shembe believing that he possesses power to influence the decisions made by ancestors on behalf of the congregants. They have substituted a new *form* but retained the old *meaning*. Kraft (1983: 115-119) reminds us by way of two diagrams that a form may have a variety of meanings and also that there may be a variety of forms attached to one single meaning. He demonstrates these thus:

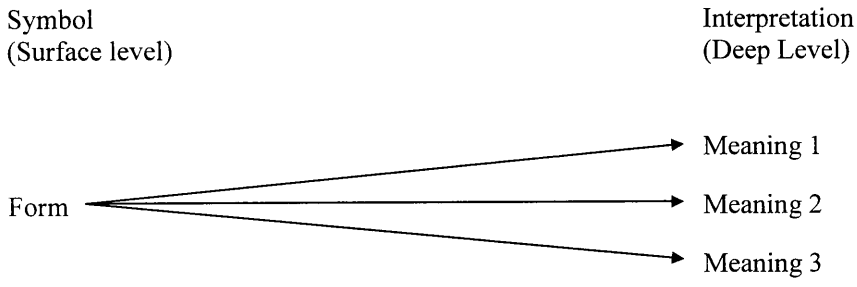

Figure 10. One Form, Multiple Meanings (after Kraft 1983:117)

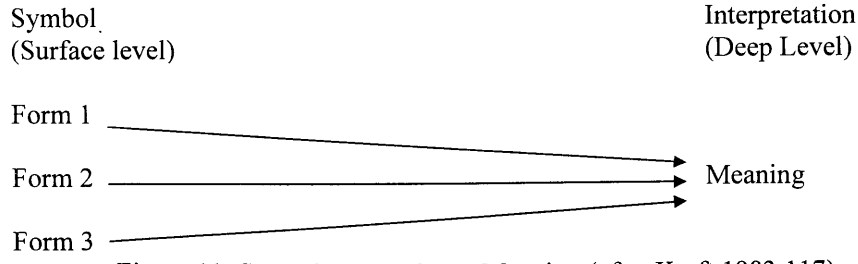

Figure 11: Several Forms, Same Meaning (after Kraft 1983:117)

It is evident that the amaNazaretha in making a conscious move away from Zulu traditional religion resist the temptation of visiting the *sangoma* (the old form) and now appeal to Shembe (the new form) as one who mediates between the living and the ancestors. Nida suggests that change in religion may be experienced in four ways: "deletion, addition, substitution, and coalescence" (1971a:244). He argues that "more often than not, change in religion means some form of substitution, a combination of addition and deletion" that results in coalescence rather than mere addition or substitution (1971a:245). Nida's argument fits the case of the amaNazaretha's move away from the *sangoma* yet gravitating to Shembe, who fills the old function. Nevertheless, the meaning has not changed in that ancestors are still central in the existential life of the amaNazaretha.

Since we know that for the African all of life's activities are viewed through religious eyes, so much so that "religion penetrates and propels all of life" (Stine and Wendlund 1990:19), I suggest that the traditional Zulu customs and biblical (Old Testament) beliefs coalesce to the point that even after almost 100 years the amaNazaretha do not differentiate between the religious and the secular cultural dynamics. The Zulu worldview with the ancestor as central takes precedence over Christian teaching regarding mediation, and thus the person and work of Christ is diminished, if not overlooked altogether.

The strategic role that ancestors have in the Zulu worldview and the amaNazaretha Church harks back to the belief in "life force" as I have explained

earlier in Chapters 2 and 4. The "life force" or power that animates and perpetuates life both for the individual and the community is derived from the ancestor (Beyerhaus 1975:79-80). Thus, ancestors in their mediatorial role are indispensable in the religio-cultural life of the amaNazaretha adherents. This fact becomes evident when, in the diminishing of "vital force" and people experience illness, misfortune, or even death, Zulus believe that such loss is attributed to the ancestor who has withheld the flow of life power and the living consequently become subject and vulnerable to the forces of evil.[19] The neglected ancestors have to be appeased through ritual sacrificial offerings before the living experience a reversal in their situation (Beyerhaus 1975:82).

The above narrative of the persons who approached Shembe's sister, the *sangoma*, argues for the entrenched belief that ancestors are the key to survival of the living in a hostile world and consequently they must be involved in the affairs of the living. While the amaNazaretha believe that God exists, "God is somehow far away and yet near, and the only real link is vouchsafed through the ancestrors in an eternally active life-principle" (Oosthuizen 1968a:7). Therefore, it is the ancestor and not Jesus Christ who serves as a link or mediates between the living and God.

I have recorded several prayers that offer us a clue as to the function and role of ancestors in the religious life of amaNazaretha members. The prayers I recorded were spontaneous, and they expressed the everyday life situations that people were experiencing at the time. Heiler differentiates between what he calls

"primary" and "secondary" prayers. The former refers to prayers that are spontaneous and the latter to prayers that are more formal (1932:3). Primary-type prayers are "closer to the real life experience of individuals," and they reveal the heartfelt desires and emotions of the worshiper (Shorter 1975:9).

In terms of Shorter's typology,[20] my research shows that amaNazaretha prayers are directed to God, the Supreme Being, but through ancestors or Shembe, thus interfacing with what Shorter calls symmetrical mediation (Figure 5 above applies in this instance as well).

In this model ancestrors are "distinct intermediaries, acting not only as vehicles for [humankind's] worship of the Supreme Being, but actually mediating [humankind's] experience of him and the gift of life itself" (Shorter 1975:11).

The question at this point in the discussion is "How does ancestral mediation affect the mediatorial role of Jesus Christ?" The universal scope of God's salvific work on behalf of a lost humanity is in and through Jesus Christ. It is central to the Christian faith. 1 Timothy 2:5-6 reads, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom...." In his discussion of these verses, Gordon D. Fee discerns three fundamental tenets of the Christian faith as being "the unity of God, Christ as mediator, and Christ's death as securing redemption" (1988:65). In the following discussion I aim to show how these three aspects (unity of God; Christ as mediator; and Christ's death as redemption) are understood or feature in the amaNazaretha beliefs and practices.

First, in my research I discovered that traditional Zulus believe in the existence of a Supreme Being followed by lesser intermediaries, and not least among them are ancestors. The religio-cultural belief in the role of ancestors is carried over when traditional Zulus join the amaNazaretha Church. The amaNazaretha, who place greater emphasis on the teachings of the Old Testament rather than the New Testament, believe that the God of the Old Testament is *the* one and *only* God, yet transcendent and removed from the existential daily lives of people. Their belief in the one God is reflected in the Sabbath liturgy, the hymns, and the sermons. As I will later argue, the amaNazaretha hold to a theology that is *theocentric*—that the God of the Old Testament is still their God and thus there exists only one God who is God of the universe and all people. However, access to the Supreme Being comes through ancestors. Consequently, the person and work of Christ has little meaning for them.

The early Christians also had to live with the tension regarding their identity as monotheistic Jews and followers of Christ at the same time. Bosch argues that in the immediate post resurrection era believers in Christ "had not yet understood themselves as being members of a separate religion over against Judaism but primarily as a renewal movement within it" (1991:58). Thus, Matthew in his Gospel, while affirming continuity with the Old Testament—that the God of the Old Testament is still the God of the New Testament—is also careful to show that Jesus is Lord and the promised Messiah, God's final revelation to human kind. Matthew does so through the various allusions and

quotations he uses from the Old Testament to sustain his argument of both promise and fulfillment.

From my study of the amaNazaretha Church, I discovered that members have not moved beyond the Old Testament in their beliefs and practices. Although they do appropriate Old Testament prophecies and promises, their interpretations are not consistent with orthodoxy. One interviewee, Evangelist Mpanza speaking on the issue of the religious beliefs of the amaNazaretha Church, said, "[In] the Nazarite Baptist Church, Isaiah Shembe took the laws of God as they are found in the Old Testament, and he took the ethical teachings of the New Testament, and then he coupled these with the customs, African customs, and he made it one thing" (RF 1: August, 2002). He went on to say that the amaNazaretha believe on the teachings of Jesus Christ but qualified his statement by referring to Christ's teachings on love, honesty, and humility (RF1: August, 2002). Evangelist Mpanza went on to affirm that the Old Testament Jewish practices were not foreign to Zulu culture. He offered examples such as animal sacrifices, purification rites, and rituals regarding the dead (RF1: August, 2002).

Second, my research shows that Christ's mediatorial role in the amaNazaretha Church's beliefs and practices is mitigated in the light of the prominent role of ancestors as mediators. The Christian Scriptures declare unequivocally that "there is a single mediator between God and humankind" (Lee and Giffin 1992:90). Lee asserts in his commentary on 1 Timothy 2:5 that

> As the God-man, Christ is uniquely qualified to serve as a go-between who can bring sinful people into God's family. The reference to Jesus as the one mediator between God and humanity rules out any understanding that angels (Dan.6:22; Gal. 3:19) served as mediators. It also excludes the Gnostic idea that intermediary deities stand between God and Humanity. (Lee and Giffin 1992:90)

The writer of the epistle, in asserting that "the one God has provided one mediator between himself and humans who is himself human, namely Christ Jesus" (George W. Knight 1992:121), also emphasizes that the one mediator excludes all other mediators. In the early church it is likely that both angels and other intermediaries were believed to stand between God and humans (Lee and Griffin 1992:90).

Third, on the basis of the Christian belief in the Scriptures, tradition, and experience, Christ's mediatorial function becomes a reality for Christians in terms of his atoning work (1 Timothy 2:6), intercession, and future return. My research has shown that ancestors, not Jesus Christ, mediate between the amaNazaretha and the Supreme Being. The question of Christ's salvific work, his death, resurrection, ascension, and return has no consequence for the amaNazaretha.

The Status and Role of Christ in the amaNazaretha Church

The taxonomy that I use to interpret the data regarding the status and role of Christ in the amaNazaretha Church is Nyamiti's (1984) *Christ as our Ancestor*. In this work Nyamiti demonstrates how ancestors may be incorporated into the existential life of Africans without obfuscating the person and work of Christ. Nyamiti goes at length to show that Christ supercedes ancestors, thus becoming

"brother" to us. He clearly defines the differences between the African ancestor and Christ as brother-ancestor. Nyamiti explains,

> ...A far more profound difference lies in the fact that Christ is God-man. For it is in virtue of His hypostatic union that He has been established as our Brother and mediator. The implication is that His Brotherhood to us is rooted not only in consanguineous ties but in the mystery of the Trinity itself. As such it transcends not only family, clanic, or racial boundaries, but any consanguineous limitations whatsoever. This means that thanks to His theandric condition Christ is potentially the Brother and Mediator of any human being whether he be of Adamite origin or not. (1984:21)

Nyamiti shows how Christ may be related to the ancestor but goes further to show the major theological difference when he juxtaposes the divinity of Christ with his humanity. Nyamiti is also careful to point, to the perichoresis, that the interpenetration of the three members of the Trinity with each other is unique to Christian theology. However, this may also be the pattern for human relationships with ancestors.

While Nyamiti's work is helpful in moving people beyond ancestor dependence, or accommodating ancestors in the cultural ethos of African tradition, and thus positioning Jesus Christ above them, my research has shown that since the amaNazaretha espouse a low christology, much work has to be done to move them to the place where they would continue to appreciate the role of ancestors yet make room for the person and work of Jesus Christ as sole mediator.

On another front, the popular bumper sticker, "Shembe is the Way," provoked me to raise the question as to what the sticker meant to amaNazaretha adherents. Most respondents believed that "Shembe is the way to heaven." When

I posed the question to Vimbeni Shembe himself, he responded, "Shembe is the way in so far as Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth. Nobody sees my Father but through me because my Father is in me and I in Him."[21] Some respondents went so far as to explain that in their understanding, believing in Shembe, will take them to heaven while others said following Shembe and obeying him would take them to heaven.

From the responses to this question, I gather that for the amaNazaretha, salvation is mediated by Shembe and that the finished work of Jesus has no effect today as he lived at a point in time and history for a particular people. Matthew's confession (Matthew 16:13-16) that Jesus is the Christ the son of the living God, a pre-resurrection confession, and Paul's hymn in Philippians 2:5-11, a post-resurrection affirmation of the finished work of Christ, compel the Christian to consider the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in order to appropriate salvation past, present, and future. His past work, present intercession on our behalf, and future coming, the Christian considers to be necessary for salvation. From my research I discovered that the amaNazaretha may subscribe to some aspects of Christ's life and times without acknowledging that he is God's final revelation.

Summary

In the final chapter, I offer some missiological implications where I will discuss the two main theories that undergird this study, namely, Hiebert's Bounded and Centered Sets model and Turner's Four Part Classification of AICs.

I will conclude with a response to the main research question: *A Christward movement is one that recognizes that "Jesus is Lord." The amaNazaretha Church could be considered a Christward movement if it affirms, "Jesus is Lord." in the sense that adherents of the Christian faith acknowledge and receive the person and work of Christ on the basis of the past (his work of atonement), present (his mediatorial role and intercession on our behalf), and future (his second coming in glory as our hope).*

I will finally offer some suggestions for how the amaNazaretha Church after almost 100 years of existence, may be brought back to orthodox Christianity.

Notes

[1] The amaNazaretha appeal to the Johannine texts to stake their claim that it is Jesus who told of Shembe's coming. They thus develop their theology on their understanding that when Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, as "he," Jesus was referring to Shembe. For example in John 16:7, Jesus says, "But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." AmaNazaretha members believe Jesus sent them Shembe.

[2] According to Oosthuizen, "Shembe uses the word *Baba* [father] in a much broader connotation than "my father' in the Western sense. Shembe uses it in two senses: 1. earthly people; 2. the Supreme Being as in the Zulu Bible translations" (1976:24). Oosthuizen shows how the term *baba* is used to refer to the Supreme Being on one hand and to Isaiah Shembe on the other in the Shembe hymns. (For example, see Isl.26:3; Isl 32:3). Vimbeni Shembe is also called *Baba* by the congregants toady. The relationship between Isaiah Shembe and God the Father is viewed in an unorthodox way among the amaNazaretha for the following reasons: 1) Isaiah Shembe himself claimed equality with God when he once made the statement that he was present at creation, and in so doing he aligned with the supernatural world. 2) Members of the amaNazaretha Church see Shembe as a personification of God. As my interviews showed, people claimed, "He is God to us by the very miracles he does for us." The role of the Holy Trinity in the amaNazaretha requires a separate study as there does not seem to be any crystallization of the doctrine presently.

[3] See Chapter 1 above for his typology.

[4] *NkulunKulu* is the Zulu name for God or the Supreme Being; Dingane and Senzangakhona are ancient Kings of the Zulu nation.

[5] *Thixo* is another name for the Supreme Being used in the Zulu Bible.

[6] Zibone is a small town in Zululand, the province of Natal.

[7] I earlier recounted Isaiah Shembe experience where he believed God called him through thunder and lightning and a series of divine revelations. See Chapter 1 and Chapter 4.

[8] When asked by some white ministers in South Africa, "of all of the prophets, which one are you?" Shembe replied, "I am not Jesus, I am not Jeremiah, nor any other, but I am Shembe." When provoked further to reveal his "true" identity with the question, "Where do you come from?" Shembe responded, "My children, I cannot tell you that. All that I can tell you is that when Moses saw the burning bush, I was there" (Loubser 1996:274). Shembe not only identifies himself with Moses but perhaps takes upon himself a deified role superior to Moses.

[9] Although I did not study specifically the role of the Trinity in the amaNazaretha belief system, from my research I discovered that the amaNazaretha understanding of the Holy Trinity does not emerge clearly as Shembe is said sometimes to be *the* Holy Spirit while at other times he is said to *possess* the Holy Spirit. Further, from the above response to my question the respondent draws the conclusion that since there is no difference between the Holy Spirit and God, Shembe occupies all three positions, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I comment further on this issue in my conclusions to this study in Chapter 8.

[10] See Appendix 4 for translation of Morning, Evening and Sabbath liturgies.

[11] Verses 6-7 reads as follows: "...Having said this, he [Jesus] spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. 'Go,' he told him, 'wash in the Pool of Siloam' (this word means sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing."

[12] James 5:14 reads, "Is anyone of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord."

[13] The error that says that a person can be deified, becoming God.

[14] This chair represents the presence of the ancestor who aids the diviner in her work.

[15] The term "cleanse" refers to the purification rite performed by the family through the living Shembe. The rite releases the ancestor from "jail" or an undesirable place and reunites the ancestor with the company of the living dead.

[16] A *sangoma* is a diviner-healer in the Zulu tradition in South Africa. The *sangoma* derives his or her power from an ancestor and functions as an ancestral spirit. In a consultation the ancestral spirits of the patient speak through the *sangoma's* mouth as if the ancestor were present. The ancestral spirit reveals among other things, imminent death, sickness, the failure to keep vows, and abrogation of taboos.

[17] My research assistant, Joseph Mhlongo, reported that this woman claimed to possess the spirit of Isaiah Shembe's mother. This belief is in keeping with the calling or authentication of a *sangoma*, that she or he possesses the spirit of one's ancestor. Joseph also told me that any member of the church who visited the *sangoma* for spiritual assistance, if found out, he or she would have to pay a penalty and be cleansed before engaging in any spiritual activity in the church.

[18] See Eugene A. Nida (1960:25-27) for examples of functional substitutes in the Early Church.

[19] It should be noted that "vital force" or power according to African traditionalists may also be obtained through "magical practices" (Oosthuizen 1968a:5). According to Zahniser, "Magic consists of symbolic and ritual procedures designed to control and manipulate real, imaginary, or symbolic powers. These powers become the sources of

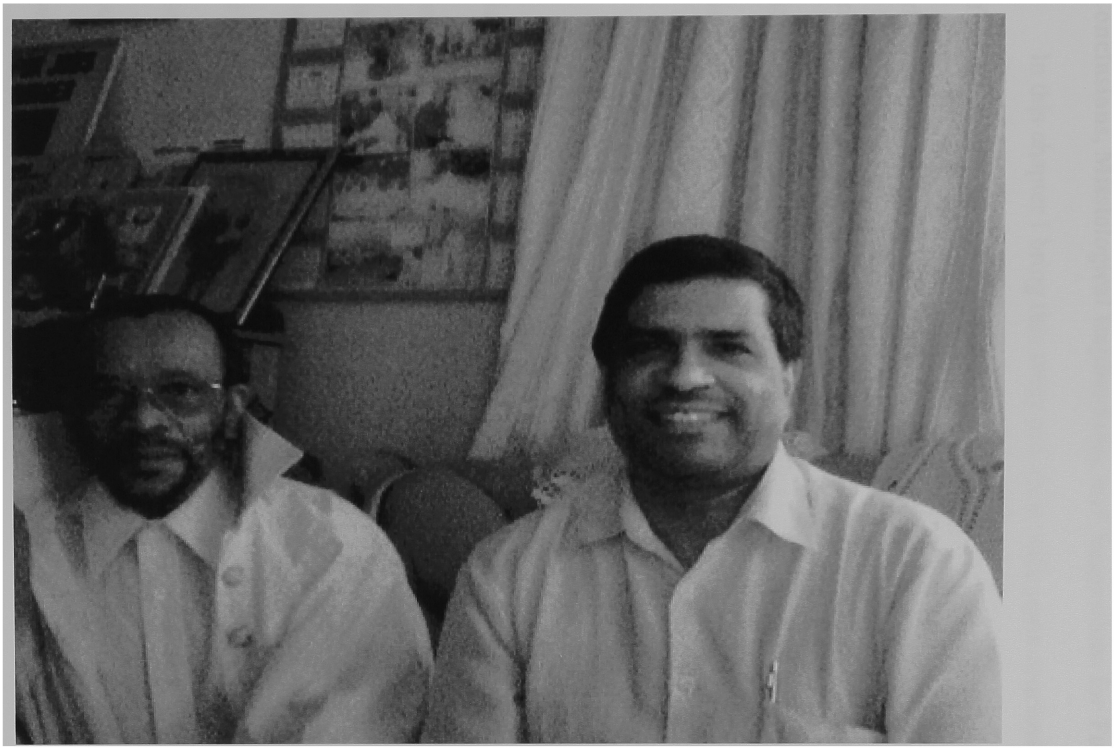

Plate 5: At the end of four years of research and study the author finally was given an interview with BishopVimbeni Shembe. Picture taken in Shembe's living room

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Chapter 8

Conclusions, Missiological Implications, and Suggestions for Further Study

In this chapter I bring this study to a close with some conclusions where I unfold the three main theories that I used to interpret the data from my interviews and participant observation. I then offer some missiological implications that derive from my study as generalized principles for missiology. I conclude by suggesting some areas for further research that were beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Conclusions: Shembe, Ancestors, or Christ ?

I return to the purpose of this study, namely, that my intention was to discover if the amaNazaretha Church is a Christward movement. I defined a Christward movement as one that recognizes that "Jesus is Lord." I argued through the dissertation that the amaNazaretha Church could be considered a Christward movement *if* it affirms, "Jesus is Lord" in the sense that adherents of the Christian faith acknowledge and receive the person and work of Christ on the basis of the past (his work of atonement), present (his mediatorial role and intercession on our behalf), and future (his second coming in glory as our hope). Specifically, we considered the mediatorial role of Christ in the lives of the amaNazaretha from three perspectives: first, Christ's work of atonement as one who forgives our sins through his finished work on the cross and thus reconciles

us with the Father; second, his work as healer; and third, his intercession on our behalf in our prayers.

I have thus far shown through my field research with interviews and participant observation that Shembe and ancestors occupy a more dominant role than Jesus Christ, both in the everyday lives of the amaNazaretha people and in their religious activities and observances. This finding brings me to the place where I now apply my theoretical framework to interpret the data and demonstrate that the AmaNazaretha espouse a low Christology in their beliefs and practices and therefore do not qualify as a Christward movement.

Hiebert's Bounded and Centered Set Theory

The first of the three main theories is Hiebert's (1994:112) "Bounded and Centered Sets" theory as depicted in figure 2 below:

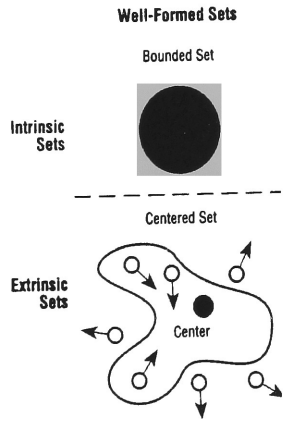

Figure 2. A Typology of Sets (after Hiebert 1994:112)

In Chapter 1, I discussed Hiebert's taxonomy of Intrinsic Bounded Sets as those that "are formed on the basis of the essential nature of the members themselves—on what they are in and of themselves.... They are all uniform in character" (1994:110). According to Hiebert, the Christian in the category of bounded set is determined on the basis of the characteristics that go to make up what is Christian. To be Christian is determined by both orthodoxy (right beliefs) and orthopraxis (right practices). Further, by viewing the Christian category of the bounded set, one can draw a sharp distinction between Christians and people of other faiths. If Christianity is perceived as a bounded set, the boundary determines where the person is in terms of her or his Christian faith. The boundary separates a Christian from one who is *not* a Christian. The bounded set also suggests that all Christians within the set will be considered as equal, irrespective of age differences or the length of time one is part of the Christian tradition. In other words, no distinction is made between experienced Christians and those who are relatively new to the faith (1994:115). The critical point in this set is that "conversion is seen as a single, dramatic crossing the boundary between being a non-Christian and being a Christian" (1994:15). Conversion to the Christian faith is discerned by one's faith in Jesus Christ both in word and deed, which the new convert has appropriated. The bounded set approach is too restrictive in that it does not allow for conversion to be experienced as a process as one gains maturity in Christian beliefs and practices. It assumes that when one comes to conversion as in the category of the bounded set, one is fully Christian immediately in the

sense that one has been converted, discipled, and matured as a Christian all at the same time.

The extrinsic or centered set is defined by its center and the relationship of people to that center, as the diagram shows. What is critical in the centered set is that people "related to the center belong to the set and those not related to the center do not" (1994:123). Hiebert's idea in this model is that, in the case of people who may or may not be considered Christian, the reference point is not the fixed boundary as in the Bounded Set, but it is the movement toward or away from the center. In other words, "Distant members can move toward the center, and those near it can slide back while still headed toward it" (1994:124). However, there is still the boundary; it includes all of those who are making a conscious effort to move in a Christward direction. The conversion experience orients one in the direction of the set though one may not be close to the center. However, those moving away from the center place themselves outside of the boundary and thus are considered non-Christian.

Hiebert uses the language of sanctification to suggest that salvation is a process in which the new convert grows in faith daily (1994:116). The centered set model lends itself to the doctrine of sanctification, where one who has turned in a Christward direction through faith in Jesus Christ, conforms (moves toward) more and more to the likeness of Christ everyday. The centered set emphasizes relationships—how one relates to the center—more than mere cognitive assent and verbal articulation of Christian doctrine.

Sanctification has been interpreted in various ways in Christian history. John Wesley, in his significant contribution to Methodism, namely, the doctrine of Christian Perfection, regarded this state as "'pure love reigning alone in the heart and life' and as a real possibility for every Christian who has first been justified by faith" (Harvey 1964:178). Justification comes by faith in Jesus Christ alone. Sanctification, or to use Wesleyan language, Christian Perfection, is incipient in regeneration. It is a process all throughout one's Christian journey, conforming one more each day to the likeness of Jesus Christ. In the centered set model the new convert acknowledges that she or he has accepted the grace offered by none other than Christ.

In applying this taxonomy to the amaNazaretha Church, one has to ask the question, "Are amaNazaretha members moving *towards* the center because they acknowledge Jesus Christ as sole mediator between God and humankind and irrespective of how defective that knowledge may be articulated both in their beliefs and practices, or have they moved *away* from the center?" To be drawn to the center is to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and God and as the center of one's life both in word and deed.

First, my research has shown that Vimbeni Shembe and the ancestors have displaced Jesus Christ in terms of his mediatorial work since the amaNazaretha members now call on Shembe and the ancestors in their prayers, and Shembe mediates healing to his congregation in the sense that while people believe that

God ultimately heals, it is Shembe and not Jesus Christ who mediates between God and people.

Second, in my study of the amaNazaretha preaching, I discovered that the Old Testament was used more, and more centrally, than the New Testament, and that Shembe and his words and works are given greater prominence than Jesus Christ. Harold Turner (1965b:11) from his experience studying the Church of the Lord (Aladura), concurs with Greenslade (1953:214-217), who suggested that a movement should be judged whether it is a church or not, not by what it lacks but by what it possesses. In this regard he was referring to the primacy— both the acceptance and authority —of the Bible. Karl Barth (1956:753) went further to suggest that the question is not just the acceptance or possession and acknowledging the Bible as the law of the church's faith and order, but more important it is whether the church actually is a witness to Jesus Christ.

Harold Turner documented sermons preached in the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and came to the conclusion that the New Testament was quoted and used in the sermons more than Old Testament texts. The Gospels featured prominently, where the works and words of Jesus dominate. A comparative study was done concurrently with Anglican Church in the Nigeria, which showed a slightly higher ratio for the New Testament to that of the Church of the Lord (Aladura). I make this comparison only to suggest that the amaNazaretha have not moved beyond the Old Testament teaching; consequently, Jesus Christ is not central in the beliefs and practices in the church. My research has shown that the

words of Isaiah Shembe and his successors dominate the preaching in the church and are given equal status with the Bible.

In terms of Hiebert's model of the Centered Set, I suggest that Isaiah Shembe, when he seceded from the Wesleyan and Baptist churches and gained his own following, was closer to the center, that is, the orthodox Christian faith, and thus in a Christward direction. However, with time he and his followers moved away from the center— in relation to Jesus Christ—making Shembe the new center. His successors, including Vimbeni Shembe, are accorded similar status to that of the founder. In the words of Vimbeni Shembe, "We are not a Christian Church, but we are a Nazarite Church." The above two examples, in the light of Hiebert's taxonomy, suggest that the amaNazaretha Church presently may not be considered a Christward movement as Jesus Christ is not Lord of the church.

Harold Turner's New Religious Movements Typology

The second of the three theories I applied to interpret the data is Harold Turner's New Religious Movements Typology (1976c:1-34). The figure below represents the four categories thus: (a) Neo-primal, (b) Synthesist, (c) Hebraist, and (d) Independent Churches:[1]

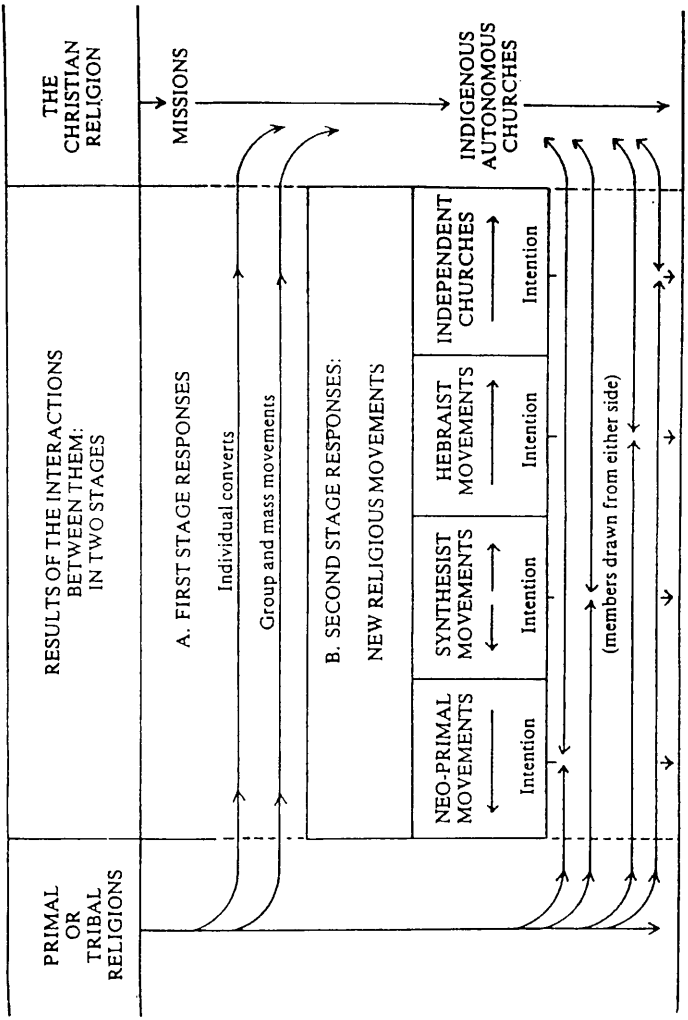

Figure 3. Four-Part Classification of African Independent Churches (Turner 1981:49)

People in neo-primal movements are those who, though opposed to Christianity, have rejected the traditional gods and spirits and have accepted the one Supreme God.

The next grouping, Synthesists, identify with neither the traditionalists nor the Christian movement. They do, however, borrow from both these traditions and consequently constitute a new movement quite different from the original traditional form. Hebraists, on the other hand, make a conscious move away from traditional religions to the world of the Bible. This group places more importance on the Old Testament than the New. Since they reject Christianity, they, consequently, place very little importance on the New Testament. The last group are the Independent Churches. Having converted from traditional religions, they now follow the teachings of the Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments. According to Turner,

> [T]hey use the Scriptures, they make something central of Jesus Christ and especially of the Holy Spirit...They may be described as having been founded in Africa by Africans for Africans to worship God in African ways and to meet African needs as Africans feel them....(1989:10-11)

In their use of the whole Bible, although pneumatology appears to be dominant, the words and works of Jesus Christ are not overlooked but in fact are central to their beliefs and practices.

In terms of Turner's taxonomy, my research suggests that the amaNazaretha most closely fits his Hebraist type, only in the light of their strict adherence to Old Testament teachings. My research findings described in Chapter

5 and my participant observation discussed in Chapter 6 show that the amaNazaretha Church, while moving away from Zulu Traditional Religion, have gravitated to the Old Testament. In my interview with Vimbeni Shembe, as I have reported above, he affirmed that the amaNazaretha Church is not a Christian Church but a Nazarite movement. In my interview with the "theologian" of the church, Evangelist Mpanza, I learned that the amaNazaretha Church is not Christian in that it is a combination of three religious systems: Zulu traditional religion and culture, the Old Testament teachings as observed by Jews, and the ethical teachings of the New Testament. Dominant in the religio-cultural ethos of the amaNazaretha Church are the Old Testament Nazarite proscriptions and the Old Testament Jewish laws, particularly the Levitical laws and Sabbath prohibitions. In interviews, both members and ministers in the church explained their religious affiliation in response to my question "How would you characterize your religious affiliation? Are the amaNazaretha Christian?" thus:

1. "We are different from Christians. We follow our traditional customs, and follow the rules of the Bible. Christians do not follow the rules, like shaving, wearing shoes and the Sabbath." (MR:10)

2. "…For example we worship on the Sabbath as Jesus did. But the Christians do not follow that. Even the Zion Church is different from amaNazaretha." (MR:14)[2]

3. "The amaNazaretha is a combination of Judaism, Christianity, and traditional religion." (EV:1)

4. "The problem is that followers of Jesus do not worship on the Sabbath. They wear shoes when they go to church even though the Christians' principles from God deny that. Most of them shave. So the Christians

are anti practitioners [Christians do not follow of the laws of God as prescribed in the Old Testament]. (YL:3)

5. "I respect Jesus. I am a Nazarite. But I am not a Christian. I do not follow him [Jesus].I follow the rules as a Nazarite. I have never seen in the Bible where it says that followers of Christ were called Christians." (LP:1)

6. "The messiah to them [Christians] is still Jesus Christ. We believe Jesus has sent another messiah. God has sent the next messiah, while the Christian are still waiting for the next messiah. We believe that the next messiah has come." (LP:31)

The above responses confirm that dominant in the beliefs and practices of the amaNazaretha are early Jewish teachings as found in the Old Testament. Turner's Hebraist typology fits closest to the amaNazaretha profile, where they have moved from Zulu traditional religion, yet they have not yet moved from the Old Testament to a New Testament position in terms of their beliefs and practices. From the review of the literature on this score, I learned how the amaNazarethas make the connection between the Old Testament and Zulu tradition. Oosthuizen, citing an interview with Londa Shembe, the son of J. G. Shembe and the grandson of Isaiah Shembe, wrote,

> ...He [Londa Shembe] firmly believed that his grandfather had a special place in the celestial sphere. For him, Isaiah Shembe was a messianic figure who had been a messiah to eight other people, before he was incarnated into the Zulu people.[3] Thus, Londa Shembe saw Isaiah Shembe as a global figure who was born into the Zulu nation at a special stage of their history to be their messiah....Londa Shembe maintained that his grandfather, Isaiah Shembe, continued the essence of Jewish religion in his own teachings. He taught that the biblical prophet Jeremiah referred to the Zulu people, whom he believed were descended from the Jews. (1994:24)

My field research, study of the literature, and the above statements attributed to Londa Shembe, suggest that Turner's taxonomy of Hebraists movements place the amaNazaretha Church in this category, without considering other aspects of the amaNazaretha beliefs and practices I discovered in my research. As is the case with those who espouse Judaism, the New Testament and its teaching on the person and work of Christ bear little relevance for the amaNazaretha, except that it is their belief that Shembe replaced Jesus and it is he who promised Shembe's coming to the Zulu nation. Given this development, Turner's typology does not account for this third component in the amaNazaretha beliefs and practices, namely that Shembe has replaced Christ. Consequently, I argue (later in the chapter) for a new typology that shows the amaNazaretha to be a post-Christian movement, thus going beyond Turner's Hebraist model but not in the direction of indigenous Christianity.

N. T. Wright: Christological Interpretation

Third, for a theological and christological interpretation of the data, I studied the writings of N. T. Wright. Wright's book *What Paul Really Said* (1997), and his article "Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire" (2001) are two pieces of literature that I use to interpret the data and thus offer a response to the main research question, "Is the amaNazaretha Church a Christward Movement?"

In his chapter "Herald of the King," Wright argues for Paul's use of the term "gospel" in the New Testament. Wright lifts two passages from Isaiah (40:9; 52:7), that predate Israel's return from exile, to show the proleptic nature of the

Old Testament passages as good news, and the arrival of a herald who will vindicate Israel and liberate her from bondage. He argues that this Jewish background is the context for the New Testament understanding of the term "gospel" (1997:43).[4] He says,

> When their God, YHWH, acted within history to deliver his people, the spurious gods of the heathen would be defeated. If and when YHWH set up his own king as true ruler, his true earthly representative, all other kingdoms would be confronted with their rightful overlord...To announce That YHWH was king was to announce that Caesar was not. This was the 'good news' that Isaiah's herald was called to proclaim. (1997:44)

Isaiah's message is thus seen as a prolepsis. It is a message from God about God that relates to the message concerning his Son and this message God imparted to the prophet. In other words, the gospel of the Old Testament anticipates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Wright's words, "Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah, is Lord" (1997:46). This was the fulfilled promise that God gave through Abraham for all the nations of the world, that evil will be finally eradicated. The promise reaches its climax when Paul says in Galatians 6:15 that "Neither circumcision or uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation." The fact of a new creation and Christ's role in it is again affirmed by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, the old has gone and the new has come." It is in Christ that humankind undergoes a radical transformation resulting in an entirely new person.

Wright argues that the prophetic utterances in the Old Testament, in this instance the Isaianic servant songs passages, had a futuristic event in view, which

culminates in the death of Jesus Christ. Thus, the God of the Old Testament is also the God of the New Testament, who finally reveals himself in the person of Jesus Christ. This revelation is Paul's "good news" that "the Messiah died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15).

My research has shown that the amaNazaretha believe and call upon the name of the God of the Old Testament, Jehovah. However, their belief is that Jesus did die and rise again, but that he had come to this earth specifically for the Jews at a particular time in history. Consequently, his death upon the cross has little relevance for them. Bosch argues in his study of Matthew's Gospel in *Transforming Mission* (1991) that the Jewish community in his (Matthew's) day also needed counsel regarding the person and work of Christ and their own position as part of the Jewish tradition. Bosch says, "The purpose of the so-called formula quotations is to prove that Jesus is the Messiah and as such the fulfillment of Old Testament promises" (1991:59). According to Senior (Senior and Stuhlmueller 1983:241), Matthew, in his endeavor to refute the way Jewish theologians use Scripture, uses the Old Testament as witness against them by casting "the aura of fulfillment to practically every dimension of Jesus life."

The amaNazaretha, however, are yet to be convinced that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment and God's final revelation of the entire biblical story, culminating in his Lordship through death, resurrection, and his enthronement. Paul's "gospel" is the good news that the covenant God of the Old Testament does finally reveal himself to the world in the person of Jesus Christ.

In Wright's study of the Philippians passage (2:5-8),[5] he states,

> The truth about God is revealed, for Paul, supremely on the cross. As he says in Romans, 'God commends his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' The sentence, we should note, only makes sense if, somehow, God is fully and personally involved in the death of Jesus Christ.

Wright argues again that it is in fulfillment of the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that God demonstrates his "deep, utterly self-giving, utterly trustworthy love" (1997:68) to Paul, the once-persecuting Saul, and not only to Paul but also to a lost humanity. In an interview with a senior minister in the amaNazaretha Church, I inquired as to whether I could participate in the yearly sacrament service. When I was politely refused admittance to the sacrament service, I engaged the minister in conversation about the significance of the communion service in the amaNazaretha Church. I raised the question "Do you believe that Christ died for the sins of the world?" Minister Ngidi responded,

> If I sin now, is it forgiven because someone died 2000 years ago? If I sin now, I go to Shembe and ask for forgiveness because at this point in time Shembe is here. If I ask for atonement of sins, how will I know that Christ will forgive me? I believe Shembe because he replies to me when I ask for forgiveness. (MR:8)

From my discussion with Minister Ngidi and other members, I received similar responses, as my interviews have shown. The amaNazaretha Church does not accept the atoning work of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments. Rather, it is their belief that it was Jesus himself who promised the coming of Shembe when he was about to depart. Minister Ngidi responds thus:

> Shembe in his own words said when I came out of heaven (Christ: John 16) he [Jesus] is bidding [me] goodbye. Christ said he would ask the Comforter to come. In the very same way Shembe said that Christ sent him. It is Christ who asks for the Comforter to come to the earth. The Nazarites are the true Christians[6] because what we practice is what Christ told his Apostles. (MR:8)

My research shows that Shembe has displaced Jesus Christ. As noted above, the amaNazaretha Church believes that it is recorded in the Bible (New Testament) that Jesus would send the Comforter, who is interpreted by the amaNazaretha to be Shembe.

In N. T. Wright's third essay, "Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire," the author juxtaposes the Graeco-Roman slogan "Caesar is Lord" with Paul's proclamation that "Jesus is Lord." Wright's exegetical work on Philippians 2:5-11 brings him to affirm that Jesus Christ is the risen Lord while implicitly counteracting the claims of the political and religious lord of the day, Caesar.

Wright argues,

> ...For Paul "the gospel" is the announcement that the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth is Israel's Messiah and the world's Lord. It is in other words, the thoroughly Jewish, and indeed Isaianic, message which challenges the royal and imperial messages in Paul's world. (2002:3)

Hence, when Paul writes in Philippians 2:10 that "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow," he is suggesting that what God had claimed for God's self in Isaiah is now shared with Jesus. In Isaiah 45:23 YHWH declares, "To me, me alone every knee shall bow, every tongue swear...." Wright adds,

> ...Paul was announcing that Jesus was the true King of Israel and hence the true Lord of the world, at exactly the time in history, and over exactly

> the geographical spread, where the Roman emperor was being proclaimed, in what styled itself a "gospel," in very similar terms. (2002:5)

Paul's bold assertion puts in bold relief the question of loyalty—loyalty to the empire of Rome in the person of Caesar, or loyalty to the crucified Lord now exalted and hailed as *Kyrios*, Lord. In my participant observation at the AmaNazaretha worship Sabbath services, I noted with much interest the reverence and aura with which Vimbeni Shembe is introduced into the worship space upon his appearance. Young maidens untie his shoes so that he may enter the sacred tabernacle, worshippers bow on their knees, and as he approaches they chant, *Ameni, Oyingcwele!* meaning, "Amen, He is Holy." In Chapter 6, I described the pillow-ceremony, where worshippers go down on their knees when the pillow is brought into the temple arena. The pillow is said to represent Isaiah Shembe and his presence in the temple. Further, the bumper stickers "Shembe is the Way" and "Shembe is the Black Messiah" are slogans that carry strong sentiments for the amaNazaretha adherents. Like Caesar, Shembe is apotheosized by the worshippers. In such an environment, the Lordship of Jesus Christ recedes into the background; Jesus is not Lord for the amaNazaretha, as Shembe becomes the focus of praise, adoration, and respect.

The enthronement passage in Ephesians 1:20-21 places Jesus Christ at the right hand of God, "far above all authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the age to come." E. K. Simpson, in his commentary on Ephesians states,

> Not only has the Redeemer been released from the icy grip of death, the most tenacious of all turnkeys, but God has set Him at His own right hand, robed in mediatorial sovereignty, upraised triumphantly above all the heavenly hierarchies and given Him a name loftier than every other name however preeminent of whatsoever dynasty or dominion, present or to come. (1957:41)

However, Andrew T. Lincoln his commentary on Ephesians suggests that Psalm 110 which is employed in the Ephesians enthronement pericope was used as an enthronement psalm for the king in the Old Testament. He adds,

> Its terminology of a session at the right hand had parallels in the ancient Near East world where the king was often represented as seated next to the tutelary deity of a particular city or nation. Occupying a place on the god's right hand meant that the ruler exercised power on Behalf of the god and held a position of favor (Psalm 80:18; Jeremiah 22:24).(1990:79)

From my interviews I gathered that the slogan, "Shembe is the Way" meant that it is Shembe, not Jesus Christ, who sits at heaven's gate admitting the amaNazaretha member. One minister who claimed to have been raised from the dead by Shembe recounted his experience to me in an interview. He was killed in a train crash, and his body was sent to the local hospital mortuary after doctors had certified him as dead. Some 30 hours later he miraculously came back to life to the astonishment and surprise of the hospital staff. The minister claims that in that time of limbo he was transported to heaven, where he was met by Shembe. Shembe refused to accept him into heaven and subsequently sent him back to earth. Shembe told the man that he would be his (Shembe's) minister among the amaNazaretha people. The dominant response to my question regarding the bumper sticker "Shembe is the Way" showed that Shembe is the one who sits at the gates of heaven. At best,

members of the church suggested that Jesus, if present, would only be responsible for his own people, the Jews. The enthronement passage in Ephesians, that exalts Jesus to the position at the right hand of God as mediator for all who confess him, is obfuscated by Shembe in the amaNazaretha Church.

From my field research, both my interviews and participant observation, and my study of the literature and in the light of the above discussion on Christology, I conclude that the amaNazaretha Church does not qualify to be a Christward Movement as Jesus Christ is not Lord of their lives. It is Shembe who has succeeded Jesus Christ and thus occupies the central place in their lives.

Missiological Implications

I wish to suggest four implications emanating from my study that may be applied to future missiological studies. They are 1) a revision of Turner's four part classification of AICs; 2) a discipleship program that would bring AICs that are on the fringes of the Christian Church back to orthodox faith; 3) an observation that when Churches move beyond ethnic, language, and cultural barriers, they are more likely to gravitate to biblical norms rather than to cultural norms; 4) a reconsideration of Turner's view that when "When AICs get the Bible in their own language it functions as a magnet to draw them closer to orthodox beliefs and practices."

A Revision of Turner's Typology

First, I refer to Harold Turner's four-part classification of the various interactions between Christianity and tribal religions (1981:49). We are indeed indebted to Turner for his pioneering work in the field of religious studies where with acute insight and diligence he began in 1957 to study the phenomenon called New Religious Movements (NRMS). The original study of the genesis, rise, nomenclature, typology, and descriptions of each type is indeed the monumental achievement of Turner. While Turner has engaged in the study of various New Religious Movements, he is particularly known for his work among the African Independent Churches, more so in the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in Nigeria. Turner characterizes his first meeting with Aladura members on a beach that began "by accident" in 1957.[7]

Turner's four-part classification (see typology in this chapter above) of African Independent Churches depicts both the first and second stage responses to the Christian gospel. In the first stage, people move from primal or tribal religions to what he terms mission churches; the second stage depicts four groups, namely, Neo-primal movements, Synthesist movements, Hebraists movements, and finally Independent Churches. The first movement, Neo-primal, is most likely in the second stage to move back to primal or tribal religions; the second group, the Synthesist movements can move in either direction, that is, back to tribal religions or forward to Indigenous Autonomous Churches; the third group, the Hebraists, are more likely to move forward to Indigenous Autonomous Churches; and,

finally, Independent Churches are more likely to move in a forward direction to Indigenous Autonomous Churches.

My research has shown that according to Turner's taxonomy, the amaNazaretha *could* fall into the Hebraists category given the fact that they resonate with the Old Testament. I have also shown that a revival of Zulu culture and a strong emphasis on the Old Testament Jewish laws and some use of the New Testament coalesced to the point that the amaNazaretha Church in the final years of Isaiah Shembe's life had already gravitated to a position somewhere between a Synthesist movement and the Hebraist movement positions. Whereas Turner's diagram depicts the Hebraists as having the potential to move in a Christward direction rather that back to a Synthesist position, I argue that the amaNazaretha Church *could* also fall into a category between the Hebraists and the Synthesists. Yet, Turner's taxonomy does not allow for a position where the leader, Shembe, has replaced Christ and the Holy Trinity, thus going beyond a Christian orthodox position. A new category needs to be created to accommodate this new phenomenon in African religious movements into Turner's typology—a post-Christian movement. My sketch below shows where I place the amaNazaretha Church in a revised typology:

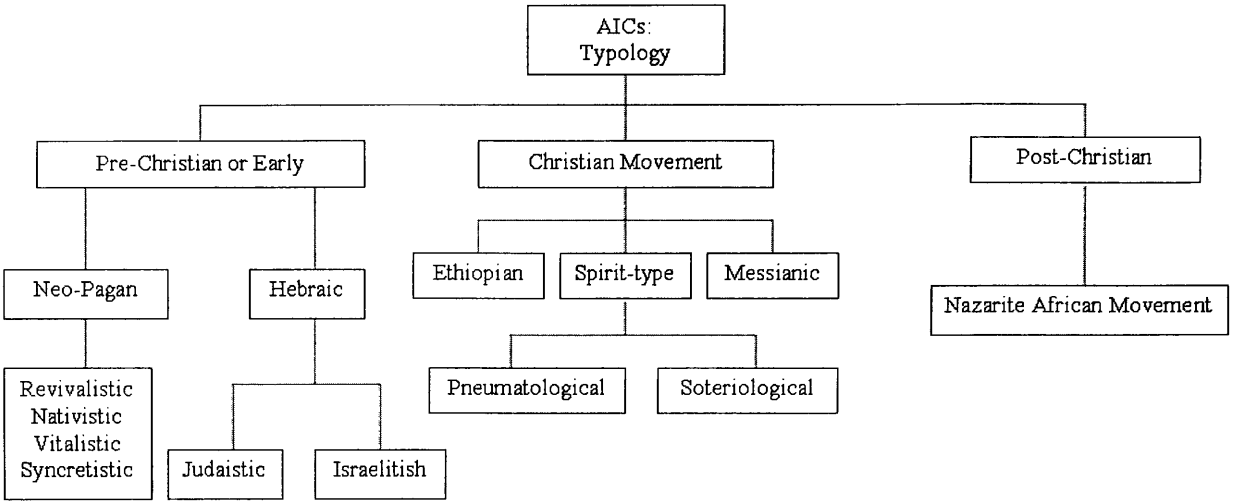

Figure 12. A Revision of Turner's Four –Part Classification of New Religious Movements that Accommodates the Category of Post-Christian Groups

The creation of this post-Christian category is necessary in light of my research and interviews where three religious systems are at work in the amaNazaretha Church. As Evangelist Mpanza stated, "The Nazarite Baptist Church of Isaiah Shembe took the laws of God as they are found in the Old Testament. He took the ethical teachings of the New Testament, and then he coupled these with African customs and he made them one thing."[8] A close aide of Vimbeni Shembe, Preacher Sibisi, told me in an informal conversation that the amaNazaretha Church is not a Christian Church but a new religious movement. He did not, however, elaborate. From my observations and field research, granted that my research pertains to one group of religious people, I believe that Turner's taxonomy would need to be expanded to accommodate groups that may imbibe more than two systems and move beyond a Christian position. While Oosthuizen is convinced that the amaNazaretha Church "is not a Sabbatarian Christian sect but is a definite nativistic messianic movement" (1968a:28), I see the amaNazaretha as a post-Christian Judeo Zuluized Religious movement with the potential to move back to an indigenous Christian orthodox position. Presently, I would place the amaNazaretha beyond Turner's Indigenous Autonomous Church position to a new position, namely, post-Christian.

An Indigenous Discipleship Program

Second, a discipleship program that would bring AICs that are on the fringes of the Christian Church back to orthodox faith could and should be developed. Schreiter raises a caution that applies to the amaNazaretha Church. He

asks, "Is a local church willing to stand under the judgment of other churches in the matter of its Christian performance or does it close itself off, assured of its own truth?" (1985:120). Historically we know that before Isaiah Shembe seceded from the Wesleyan Church and later the African Baptist Church he had received some catechetical instruction and also had the opportunity to lead the Wesleyan service on occasion. However, when he seceded from these churches and gained his own following we are not told as to whether he received formal Bible training. We know that he planted churches everywhere he had preached the gospel, prayed for the sick, and counseled people. Local leadership developed from faithful followers and disciples. The movement grew to be what it is today, some two million people throughout South Africa and in the surrounding African countries. They have been in existence now for almost 100 years with no outside influence or ecumenical fellowship. Leaders in the church, ministers, evangelists, and preachers are awarded position in the church on the criteria of faithful membership over a long and protracted period of time; leaders from other churches who have joined the amaNazaretha Church are awarded positions on the basis of their office held in their former churches; and some leaders are selected on the basis of their superior education and professional status. From my research I discovered that none of the ministers, evangelists, or preachers had had any Bible instruction or formal theological education. Vimbeni Shembe himself, who studied to become a teacher, but never taught a class, herded his father's cattle before he was called to leadership upon the death of his father.

Schreiter's caution is pertinent to the case of the amaNazaretha Church that has not opened themselves to the test of the larger church community, and today has moved significantly away from a Christian orthodox position.

A follow-up principle would be to introduce a discipleship program that may be taught by trained indigenous leadership. The larger church whose expatriate missionaries are on the field may be involved in the training and implementation of the discipleship program, with a preplanned exit strategy. The exit strategy will foster and perpetuate the preparation of new indigenous leadership over time. An alternate strategy may be to select one or more individuals for scholarships and grants to travel to first world countries where they may receive their education and return to train new leaders. In this way the older churches in the North Atlantic community have the opportunity to partner with younger churches in the South and thus create a positive ecumenical environment that augers well for the larger church. I have personally identified one individual in the amaNazaretha Church who is willing to come to the United States to study theology and return to help the church in a discipleship program.

I liken this experiment to the life and times of Saint Patrick. Hunter writes that Patrick "trained for the priesthood perhaps in Rome, or in Gaul, more likely in England. His training immersed his mind in the scriptures, and grounded him in the basic orthodox theology that prevailed in the Western Church of that time" (2000:15). When Patrick received his "Macedonian Call" to take the gospel back to his captors, he was ordained and appointed to Ireland as a missionary bishop

(2000:15). Patrick's ministry in Ireland was fruitful because he had learned the culture from an *emic* perspective, as an insider although under captivity. The principle here is that an indigenous leader trained in a Western seminary or Bible College could be an effective discipler in his or her own context like Patrick who knew the culture of Ireland.

With an oral culture like the amaNazaretha Church, a discipleship program that meets the needs of non- and semi-literate people will be the key for effective discipleship. Several programs may be recommended. One may be the Chronological Bible Story method, which uses selected stories from the Bible that are told in chronological order with dialog and discussion after the story is told. This method allows the story teller to ask relevant questions that will guide the listener to discover the important facets of the story and thus discover the meaning conveyed in the biblical story (http://www.chronologicalbiblestorying.com/articles/desciption.htm).

In the amaNazaretha Church I learned that stories are told to communicate faith, and these stories operate in tandem with the Bible. The preacher, though illiterate recalls Bible verses from memory. The chronological method of storying takes the person or congregation from the Old Testament into the New Testament and thus presents Jesus Christ as the final revelation from God. Where people in some religious movements have not moved beyond the Old Testament, the chronological story method reduces such a possibility significantly. The

amaNazaretha Church is one example of a church that has not moved beyond the Old Testament teachings and consequently espouses a low Christology.

Nussbaum (1985:8) who claims that the "Mennonites [have] placed more personnel in more countries than any other groups working with independents" (1985:8), argues for a dialogical approach to discipleship developed by Mennonite pioneers, Edwin and Irene Weaver. The Weavers' approach was one of learning from the indigenous people, while teaching them through "inductive, small-group Bible studies" (1985:8). In his dissertation, Nussbaum endorses the Weavers' approach suggesting that it "has significant bearing on both the understanding and the communication of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (1985:8).

I propose that the chronological approach to studying the Bible with a dialogical approach as adopted by the Mennonites will resonate with the amaNazaretha Church and other churches that have not as yet come to fully embrace Jesus Christ as God's full and final revelation for all of creation.

I stated earlier, (Chapter 1) that my study of the amaNazaretha will open new vistas of opportunity for evangelicals that have hitherto brushed aside the African Initiated Churches as aberrant and at the margins of orthodoxy. I believe that my study will be a catalyst to initiate dialogue and discussion between the AICs and other churches. Further, that evangelicals who are passionate about kingdom work, will find innovative ways to work alongside indigenous Africans in discipleship programs. Where previously held caricatures and stereotypes

existed, they will now be transformed into greater appreciation for the AICs as they also belong to the household of God.

Biblical and Cultural Considerations

Third, is an observation that when churches move beyond ethnic, language, and cultural barriers, they are more likely to gravitate to biblical norms rather than to cultural norms if they have access to the Bible in their own language. The amaNazaretha is predominately a Zulu ethnic movement, and consequently the Zulu culture and traditions predominate in the church. The Zion Christian Church, on the other hand, the largest AIC in South Africa, with seven million members, consist of various ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups. The result is that it is not possible to gravitate to one cultural or linguistic expression in the church. I submit that the ZCC is much closer to Christian orthodoxy because they appeal to the Bible as their common source rather than to only one cultural and linguistic expression. In contrast, for the amaNazaretha Church, cultural norms take precedence over biblical norms.

The Bible and Orthodoxy

Fourth, I wish to consider Turner's view that when "AICs have the Bible in their own language it functions as a magnet to draw then closer to orthodox beliefs and practices."[9] While this conclusion comes through Turner's experience from his study of the AICs, I discovered, as my research has shown, that the amaNazaretha have had the Bible in their own Zulu language for almost 100 years[10] but have not moved toward a Christward position. On the contrary, as I

have already intimated, they have moved away from an orthodox Christian position. In his discussion of the "linguistic drift," Linguist Edward Sapir demonstrated that built into the structure of every language is a prefigured linguistic pattern that causes the language to change over time in a predetermined way (1921:147-170). In other words, languages have a tendency to change over time in a prescribed pattern. Similarly, V. F. Calverton argues that cultural compulsives in a society shape how a people perceive truth and reality. Anytime Christianity confronts a culture, it comes into contact with that society's cultural compulsives (1931:1-37). Hence from Sapir's linguistic drift and Calverton's cultural compulsives, we can see how the Zulu culture has shaped the amaNazaretha Church's experience and expression of Christianity. Consequently, without interacting with other Christians their religious patterns have taken on more Zulu traditional practices than Christian characteristics. This tendency for culture to dominate Christian faith underscores the critical importance of discipleship and interaction at the indigenous level with biblical norms so that indigenous groups may come closer to an orthodox Christian position.

The above four missiological implications have potential to be applied to other situations that bear similar characteristics to those of the amaNazaretha Church in Durban, South Africa.

Suggestions for Further Study

My research findings opened new vistas of inquiry for further study in the

amaNazaretha Church. However, among them were some areas that I had anticipated to cover in my research that did not materialize. I shall begin with these first.

First, I had anticipated that I would have the opportunity to observe funeral services and rituals. My attempt to gain access to the funerals, which were few and far between, was denied to me. People whose relatives had passed on were not familiar with me, so I had not gained sufficient trust to be part of the services and grave ceremonies. I did, however, attend one memorial service where the member, an elderly woman, had died the previous week. My minister friend, Gcwenza, invited me to attend the service. To ascertain beliefs about the afterlife beyond the interviews it will be necessary to be a participant observer at these services and grave rituals.

One of the new areas for study that I stumbled upon during my research was the administration of the sacrament. The communion service is held once every year at Ebuhleni, and at other large temples that Vimbeni Shembe visits during the course of the calendar year. From my conversations with some ministers of the church I gathered that the sacrament service was a very sacred ritual and only a few members were admitted to it. It is usually held at night. My research assistant, Joseph Mhlongo, confirmed that he had not been invited to one as yet, and he is a long-standing member who was raised in the church. Research in this area will further confirm what role Shembe, ancestors, and Christ have in the ceremony.

My research has also shown that the amaNazaretha have a vague, yet unorthodox understanding of the Trinity. They believe in the God of the Old Testament, God the Father; that Jesus is the Son of God and that God has many sons; and further that the Shembes are successors of Christ whom Christ promised before he departed and is recorded in the Bible. Then, the person of the Holy Spirit is most confused in the amaNazaretha Church as both members and ministers believe that Shembe is more than a surname; Shembe is also *the* Holy Spirit, or Shembe *possesses* the Holy Spirit. This area needs to be researched as I have learned from the literature and subsequently from my own research that AICs appear to portray a more overt pneumatology and a deficient Christology in their religious beliefs and practices. The amaNazaretha Church displays a greater affinity to the work of the Holy Spirit than they do to Jesus Christ.

Epilogue

I began my study of the amaNazaretha Church with a preconception that the church had come under unfair and harsh criticism regarding its beliefs and practices. Earlier studies, especially those done by Oosthuizen, were regarded as being insensitive to the amaNazaretha Church tradition. I believed that after almost 100 years of existence the church would be closer to an orthodox Christian position. However, my research shows that the amaNazaretha today cannot be called a Christward Movement as Jesus Christ is not central to the life world of the people. Yet, I believe that given time and the introduction of orthodox Christian

beliefs and practices through indigenous discipleship and training the amaNazaretha Church could become a Christward Movement again.

If the history of the church has any hope for us, I recall that the early church grappled with similar issues that the amaNazaretha Church encounters today. For example, the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) had as its main agenda the question whether Christ, the son of God, was truly and fully God as the Father. The Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.) came to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is God. Later, in 451 A. D., the Council of Chalcedon affirmed that Jesus Christ was fully human and fully God.

The amaNazaretha Church has on its side some 2,000 years of Christian tradition and thus could become a Christward movement as it struggles with its understanding of the person and work of Christ and the role of the Holy Trinity in its beliefs and practices. If the amaNazaretha Church becomes a Christward movement, its members will discover that they can be thoroughly Zulu and completely Christian at the same time. In other words, a truly Indigenous Christian church will take root in the Zulu soil of South Africa.

Notes

[1] I discussed Turner's classification earlier in Chapter 4 in greater detail.

[2] This minister went further than other respondents in that he not only discerned differences between Christians and the amaNazaretha, he also saw the amaNazaretha as different from the largest AIC in South Africa, namely, the Zion Christian Church with seven million members, a church that is considered to espouse orthodox Christian beliefs and practices in indigenous forms.

[3] Sibisi, Shembe's aide, made this statement in an interview.

[4] The passages in Isaiah read as follows: "Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings; lift it up; do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, 'here is your God!' (40:9); How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'(52:7)

[5] Verse 8 of the passage reads, "And, being found in human form, he humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross."

[6] The minister was articulating the fact that the amaNazaretha are "true Christians" in that Jesus was a Nazarite who obeyed all the Old Testament prohibitions, Sabbath, and Levitical laws whereas Christians have abrogated the said laws.

[7] See Turner (1967b), where in the preface of his first volume he speaks of this chance encounter with Adeleke Adejobi, leader of the West African Independent 'Church of the Lord (Aladura), on Lumley Beach, Freetown.

[8] Evangelist Mpanza explained in the same conversation that "most of the laws of God which are found in the Old Testament and in the Torah are similar to all African customs."

[9] This statement was cited by Darrell Whiteman from a seminar conducted by Harold Turner on NRMs held at Pyramid, Irian Jaya, Indonesia in 1981.

[10] See Appendix 6 for Bible Translations for Zulu speakers. The first Zulu Bible was printed in 1883.

Appendix 1. Interview Schedule:

The following Questions will be used in interviews
with ministers, members, and Vimbeni Shembe

A. ANCESTORS: The Role of Ancestors in the religio-cultural ethos of the amaNazaretha Church of Isaiah Shembe

1. Ancestor worship and veneration: How do Africans use these terms? Is it either/or, or both/and?

   Interview Questions (in bold type)

   When and how do you communicate with your ancestors?
   Why do you actually call on them?
   How important are ancestors to you?

   a) Is talking to Shembe the same as talking to God?
      1) **How would you differentiate between Shembe as ancestor and God?**
      2) **In what way would your conversation with Shembe be different from your conversation with God?**
   b) Is talking to Shembe the same as talking to Christ?
      1) **Would there be a time when you would talk with Shembe and Christ in the same conversation or prayer? Explain**
      2) **How would your words be different when you address Christ or Shembe?**

2) Is there a difference in understanding and articulating the status and role of ancestors among the leadership and laity in the amaNazaretha Church?
   1) **Leadership: How would you characterize the status and role of ancestors in your cultural and religious practices?**
   2) **Membership (Same question as above)**

3) What roles do ancestors play in the everyday lives of Africans in the Shembe Church who have now moved from African traditional Religion?

   What importance or value do you place on ancestors in your everyday life?

   a) Is Isaiah Shembe invoked as an ancestor or do the amaNazaretha call on other past leaders (Johannes Galilee or Amos Shembe)?

      Who do you invoke in your prayers, Isaiah Shembe, Johannes Galilee, Amos or Vimbeni? Why?

b) Are Ancestors mediators between the amaNazaretha and God?
Do the amaNazaretha talk to God directly or do you do so via ancestors? Which ancestors?

c) Do the amaNazaretha pray in the name of ancestors?
Christians generally pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Do the amaNazaretha pray in the name of Christ or ancestors?

d) When do the amaNazaretha call on ancestors?
On what occasions do you call on ancestors?

B. SHEMBE: The Role of Vimbeni Shembe

1. How significant a role does the leader, Vimbeni Shembe, play in the religious practices of the church?
What are the various duties carried out by Vimbeni Shembe?
2. Who is Vimbeni Shembe?
Describe Vimbeni Shembe as a person and who is he to you?
3. Is Vimbeni Shembe considered God by his followers?
Would you say that Vimbeni Shembe is more than a mere human being? In what way?
4 Is Vimbeni Shembe Christ?
How is Vimbeni Shembe related to Christ?
   a. Is Vimbeni Shembe the Spirit of Christ?
   Does Vimbeni Shembe possess the Spirit of Christ or is he the Christ?
   b. Does Vimbeni Shembe possess the power to forgive sins?
   Is Vimbeni Shembe capable of removing your sins or does he ask Jesus to forgive?
   c. Is Vimbeni Shembe sinless?
   Is Vimbeni Shembe without sin? Why?
   d. Is Vimbeni Shembe the Creator?
   There is a story told that Isaiah Shembe was present at creation. Would you cast Vimbeni Shembe in the same role? Why?
   e. Is Vimbeni Shembe a diviner?
   How does Vimbeni compare to the African religious diviner?

C. CHRIST: The Role of Jesus Christ

1. Who is Jesus Christ?

2. How do the ancestors affect the person and work of Christ?

3. **Are ancestors more important than Christ?**
   How does Christ mediate in the light of the place of Shembe and the Ancestors?
4. Are the AmaNazaretha Christians?
   Do you characterize yourself as Christian? Explain
5. Is Shembe the way for Africans as Jesus is the way for Christians?
   The bumper sticker says, "Shembe is the way." What do you understand by this statement?
6. Is the name of Vimbeni Shembe more powerful than the name of Christ to mediate between people and God (in terms of saving, healing and interceding)?
   Who possesses more power, Vimbeni Shembe or Christ?
7. Does Vimbeni Shembe heal in his own power independent of God or Christ?
   Who is a more powerful healer, Shembe or Christ?When you or a member of your family is ill who do you go to for healing?
8. Do the amaNazaretha pray to Vimbeni Shembe or Christ?
   When you pray do you pray to Vimbeni Shembe or Christ?
9. Do the amaNazaretha petition God in the name of Vimbeni Shembe or Christ?
   When you call on God do you do so through Christ or Vimbeni Shembe? Explain.

D. Secondary Questions

1. Is the Shembe faith for Africans only?

   How would you characterize the movement? Is the Shembe Faith for Africans only?

2. Do people call on Isaiah Shembe or the current leader, Vimbeni Shembe to meet their spiritual, material and everyday needs?
   When you encounter problems or are in want who comes first to mind, Vimbeni Shembe or Isaiah Shembe?

Appendix 2. Statistical Data of Interviewees

CP	IN	Name	G	Age	Y of Mb	Pre/Rel	EB	WS
MR	1	M.M	M	56	28yrs	EthiopC	Std4	D.Tr.
MR	2	M.M	M	56	Birth	N/A	--	--
MR	3	M.M	M	62	Birth	N/A	--	--
MR	4	-.M	M	59	Birth	N/A	--	--
MR	5	-.M	M	61	Birth	N/A	--	--
MR	6	-.K	M	62	Birth	N/a	--	--
MR	7	M.C	M	45	Birth	N/A	--	--
MR	8	-N	M	52	Birth	N/A	DIP.T	ST
MR	9	M.G	M	47	Birth	N/A	--	FW
MR	10	-.K	M	47	Birth	N/a	--	--
MR	11	-.M	M	67	Birth	N/a	--	--
MR	12	A.N	M	51	Birth	N/A	--	--
MR	13	E.N	M	57	Birth	N/A	--	--
MR	14	-.M	M	67	57yrs	N/A	--	--
MR	15	W.S	M	54	12yrs	ZCC	--	--
EV	1	M.M	M	50	Birth	N/A	BJur.	G.Of
EV	2	-.M	M	83	Birth	N/A	--	Fm
EV*	3	-.M	M	43	Birth	N/A	--	HAdm
EV	4	N.N	M	65	23yrs	StJAFM	--	--
EV	5	A.N	M	63	55yrs	N/A	--	--
EV	6	D.N	M	44	16yrs	S.Army	--	--
EV	7	M.M	M	64	Birth	N/A	--	--
EV	8	M.D	M	47	Birth	N/A	--	CF
PR	1	S.N	M	82	Birth	N/A	N.Lit	Fm.
PR	2	J.G	M	82	Birth	N/A	--	--
PR	3	-.N	M	60	25yrs	N/A	--	--
PR	4	-.M	M	58	30yrs	ATR	--	--
PR	5	-.X	M	54	27yrs	RCC	--	--
PR	6	-.M	M	56	Birth	N/A	--	--
YL	1	C.D	M	33	Birth	N/A	BPS	TU
YL	2	P.Z	M	26	10yrs	Ang.	--	--
YL	3	Z.G	M	28	Birth	N/A	--	Clerk
YL	4	V.Z	M	34	Birth	N/A	--	ST*
Uk	1	S.M	F	--	Birth	N/A	--	HW
Uk	2	M.B	F	--	Birth	--	--	CV
LP	1	J.M	M	44	Birth	N/A	Std.8	FW

LP	2	M.M	M		14yrs	ATR	--	FW
LP	3	M.N	F	88	Birth	N/A	N.Lit	Fm.
LP	4	D.P	M	74	Birth	N/A	N.Lit	Fm.
LP	5	S.M	M	70	2yrs	ZCC	N.Lit	--
LP	6	M.M	M	41	12yrs	ATR	--	--
LP	7	N.M	M	--	44yrs	ATR	--	--
LP	8	Z.D	M	--	37yrs	ATR	--	SEmp
LP	9	S.D	M	88	Birth	N/A	N.Lit	--
LP	10	-.D	M	--	7yrs	RCC	--	--
LP	11	P.M	M	--	7yrs	ZCongC	--	--
LP	12	M.N	M	42	Birth	N/A	--	--
LP	13	W.-	M	81	63yrs	ATR	--	Ret.
LP	14	M.M	M	--	16yrs	ZCongC	--	--
LP	15	I.M	M	54	6yrs	ZCC*	--	FW
LP	16	B.M	M	50	6yrs	ACC*	--	MD
LP	17	T.N	M	38	Birth	N/A	--	GSO
LP	18	M.M	M	30	20yrs	ZCC	--	--
LP	19	-.N	M	--	Birth	N/A	--	--
LP	20	M.M	F	--	6yrs	ATR	--	--
LP	21	B.D	M	51	15yrs	Meth.	--	--
LP	22	-.H	M	58	Birth	N/A	--	--
LP	23	C.M	M	22	Birth	N/A	--	UEm
LP	24	-.M	M	--	8yrs	ATR	--	--
LP	25	T.M	M	26	Birth	N/A	Mat.	UEm
LP	26	S.N	F	33	12yrs	RCC	Std.8	FW
LP	27	-.H	F	--	2yrs	ZCC	--	CV
LP	28	P.S	F	64	40yrs	ATR	--	CV
LP	29	T.M	F	--	Birth	N/A	--	--
LP*	30	L.S	F	33	Birth	N/A	--	Clerk
LP	31	M.C	F	30	Ad*.	AFM	--	Nur
LP	32	P.M	F	40	Birth	N/A	--	LE
LP	33	K.C	F	34	8yrs	ZCC	--	Nur

Meaning of Abbreviations

CP: Church Position: MR- Minister; EV- Evangelist; PR- Preacher; YL- Youth Leader; UK.- women's leader; LP-Lay Person

IN: Interview Number

Name: Name of Interviewee (Initials only)

G: Gender: (M) Male; (F) Female

Age: Age of interviewee

Y of Memb Years of membership

Pre/Rel Previous Religious Affiliation/Church: ZCC- Zion Christian Church; ATR- African Traditional Religion; RCC- Roman Catholic Church; ZCC- Zulu Congregational Church; ACC- African Congregational Church; Ang.-Anglican Church; Meth.- Methodist Church; AFM- Apostolic Faith Mission; StJAFM- St. John's Apostolic Faith Mission; S.Army- Salvation Army; EthiopC- Ethiopian Church.

EB: Educational Background: BPS- Bachelor of Arts-Political Science; Std8- Standard 8 (Grade 10); N.Lit- Nonliterate; Mat.- Matriculation (grade 12); BJur- Bachelor of Law

WS: Work Status: UEm- Unemployed; TU- Trade Union; FW- Factory worker; Fm.- Farmer; SEmp.- Self employed; Ret.- Retired; MD- Medical Doctor; Ch. Chief of a Zulu clan; GSO- Grocery Store owner; Clerk- Office worker; ST- School Teacher; HW- Housewife; CV- Curio Vender; Nur.- Nurse; LE-Law Enforcement; G.OF- Government Official; HAdm- Hospital administrator; DTr.- Director of Public Transport-KZN Province.

Statistical analyses

Total Number of Interviews:	**68**	**100%**
Lay Persons	33	48% (10 females and 23 males)
Youth Leaders	4	6%
Umkhokheli (women's leaders)	2	3%
Preachers	6	9%
Evangelists	8	12%
Ministers	15	22%
Total	**68**	**100%**

Female to Male Ratio:	12:56	18% : 82%
Church Affiliation		
Raised in the church:	38	56%
Conversion from ATR	9	13%
Conversion from ZCC	10	15%
Conversion from RCC	4	6%
Conversion from Others	7	10%
Total	**68**	**100%**

Average age of Ministers:	(15)	56 yrs
Average age of Evangelists:	(8)	57 yrs
Average age of Preachers:	(6)	65 yrs
Average age of Youth leaders:	(4)	30 yrs

No statistics were vailable for women and lay persons

Appendix 3. Vimbeni Shembe's Response to Interview Schedule[1]

A. ANCESTORS: The Role of Ancestors in the religio-cultural ethos of the amaNazaretha Church of Isaiah Shembe

1. Ancestor worship and veneration: How do Africans use these terms? Is it either/or, or both/and?

Interview Questions (in bold type)

When and how do you communicate with your ancestors?
We as Black Africans and Zulus in particular have a culture peculiar to ourselves through which we communicate with our ancestors.

Why do you actually call on them?
The head of the family will call on and invoke his ancestors to ask for safe guidance towards a certain goal, to report a good fortune or mishap that has befallen the family.

How important are ancestors to you?
Ancestors are always important in so far as one has got duties and obligations to perform towards them as a member and child born of the family.

Can you assist the ancestors in any way?
As a living human being I, M.V. Shembe cannot help ancestors in any way, in my capacity as a person, but Shembe the Holy Spirit that resides in a chosen person at a given point in time can.

a) Is talking to Shembe the same as talking to God?

1) How would you differentiate between Shembe as ancestor and God?
There is always the confusion arising out of the ambiguity in the name of Shembe because even before one renders that Shembe is a particular surname, the Holy Spirit that resided in Shembe was also called Shembe. In so far as the Holy Spirit being called Shembe there is no difference between it (Holy Spirit) and God. Taking into account also that God is said to be a Trinity. (Father, Son, Holy Spirit).

2) In what way would your conversation with Shembe be different from your conversation with God?
There will be no difference only if the Shembe in question is the Holy Spirit.

b) Is talking to Shembe the same as talking to Christ?

1) Would there be a time when you would talk with Shembe and Christ in the same conversation or prayer? Explain

Refer to hymn 58 of Izihlabelelo zamaNazaretha. Yes, the same Holy Spirit at a certain point in time was Jesus, to the Jews; Mohammed to the Islam; Confucius to the Chinese; Buddha to the Indians and Shembe to the Africans. The same Holy Spirit is called by different names in different peoples of the world.

2) How would your words be different when you address Christ or Shembe?

There will be no difference. Refer to answer number five above.

2) Is there a difference in understanding and articulating the status and role of ancestors among the leadership and laity in the amaNazaretha Church?

3) **1) Leadership: How would you characterize the status and role of ancestors in your cultural and religious practices?**

Izwi Iabantu-religious sect is not the same as the Nazareth Baptist Church in its forms, practices and beliefs.

2) Membership (Same question as above)

3) What roles do ancestors play in the everyday lives of Africans in the Shembe Church who have now moved from African traditional Religion?

What importance or value do you place on ancestors in your everyday life?

Ancestors are only called to be asked from or reported to, but not worshipped and glorified. Only God is worshipped and glorified.

a) Is Isaiah Shembe invoked as an ancestor or do the amaNazaretha call on other past leaders (Johannes Galilee or Amos Shembe)?

Who do you invoke in your prayers, Isaiah Shembe, Johannes Galilee, Amos or Vimbeni? Why?

Neither of the Shembes mentioned here is invoked in prayers in his capacity as a human being but only in so far as the Holy Spirit resides in him.

b) Are Ancestors mediators between the amaNazaretha and God?

Do the amaNazaretha talk to God directly or do you do so via ancestors? Which ancestors?

Yes, via Shembe not via ancestors. Refer to what Christ says in Matthew: read in conjunction with answer to question 24.

c) Do the amaNazaretha pray in the name of ancestors?

Christians generally pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Do the amaNazaretha pray in the name of Christ or ancestors?
Nazarites pray in the name of Shembe the Holy Spirit that resides in the person

d) When do the amaNazaretha call on ancestors?
On what occasions do you call on ancestors?
Absolutely not in the church

B. SHEMBE: The Role of Vimbeni Shembe

1. How significant a role does the leader, Vimbeni Shembe, play in the religious practices of the church?
What are the various duties carried out by Vimbeni Shembe?
M.V. Shembe does not have personal duties except for the message God sends him to deliver to the populates far and wide, being a messenger he awaits instruction from God.
2. Who is Vimbeni Shembe?
Describe Vimbeni Shembe as a person and who is he to you?
This question is misplaced since one cannot be called to describe oneself.
3. Is Vimbeni Shembe considered God by his followers?
Would you say that Vimbeni Shembe is more than a mere human being? In what way?
The Shembe who is more than a human being is the Holy Spirit in him.
4. Is Vimbeni Shembe Christ?
How is Vimbeni Shembe related to Christ?
The Holy Spirit that resided in Christ is the same Spirit in Shembe
   a. Is Vimbeni Shembe the Spirit of Christ?
   Does Vimbeni Shembe possess the Spirit of Christ or is he the Christ?
   b. Does Vimbeni Shembe possess the power to forgive sins?
   Is Vimbeni Shembe capable of removing your sins or does he ask Jesus to forgive?
   Even Jesus Christ did not absolve the sinners himself but referred them to God, the Creator, so is Shembe.
   c. Is Vimbeni Shembe sinless?
   Is Vimbeni Shembe without sin? Why?
   It's not for a living person to judge. It's God's prerogative right to do.
   d. Is Vimbeni Shembe the Creator?
   There is a story told that Isaiah Shembe was present at creation. Would you cast Vimbeni Shembe in the same role? Why?

That story refers to the Holy Spirit that was in Isaiah Shembe the biological person, which the Holy Spirit is now said to be in the present leader. That is the Holy Spirit that performs all the miracles you hear of Shembe, that heals all these multitudes following Shembe everywhere the whole year round since 1910. That is why His following is not subsiding but increasing ever more. No living person can do that, only God does.

e. Is Vimbeni Shembe a diviner?
How does Vimbeni compare to the African religious diviner?
Far above them. You will always find them with Shembe asking for His prayers to bless their concoctions so that who ever consults with them will be healed.

C. CHRIST: The Role of Jesus Christ

1. Who is Jesus Christ?

2. How do the ancestors affect the person and work of Christ?

3. **Are ancestors more important than Christ?**
No.
How does Christ mediate in the light of the place of Shembe and the Ancestors?

4. Are the amaNazaretha Christians?
Do you characterize yourself as Christian? Explain
Not in the sense of being called as such, but yes in the sense of doing His word and following His commands.

5. Is Shembe the way for Africans as Jesus is the way for Christians?
The bumper sticker says, "Shembe is the way." What do you understand by this statement?
Shembe is the way in so far as Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth. Nobody sees my Father but through me because my Father is in me and I in Him."

6. Is the name of Vimbeni Shembe more powerful than the name of Christ to mediate between people and God (in terms of saving, healing and interceding)?
Who possesses more power, Vimbeni Shembe or Christ?
That is like asking which side of the 20 cent coin is more valuable, the head or the tail.

7. Does Vimbeni Shembe heal in his own power independent of God or Christ?
Who is a more powerful healer, Shembe or Christ? When you or a member of your family is ill who do you go to for healing?

Refer to answer above and also bear in mind the difference in the life spans of Jesus Christ and Shembe. Shembe has done more because He has lived longer.

8. Do the amaNazaretha pray to Vimbeni Shembe or Christ?
   When you pray do you pray to Vimbeni Shembe or Christ?
   We pray to Shembe the Holy Spirit that was in Christ through the form of a dove that descended on him during baptismal in the Jordan river.
9. Do the amaNazaretha petition God in the name of Vimbeni Shembe or Christ?
   When you call on God do you do so through Christ or Vimbeni Shembe? Explain.
   Same as above.

D. Secondary Questions

1. Is the Shembe faith for Africans only?
   How would you characterize the movement? Is the Shembe Faith for Africans only?
   No, it is for all living human beings referred to in hymn 153, verse 2
   Abansundu nabamhlophe,
   Libamema kwananjalo;
   Alikhethi noma munye
   Liyamema bonke abantu.

2. Do people call on Isaiah Shembe or the current leader, Vimbeni Shembe to meet their spiritual, material and everyday needs?
   When you encounter problems or are in want, who comes first to mind, Vimbeni Shembe or Isaiah Shembe?
   Shembe the Holy Spirit that resided in both of them.

Appendix 4: Morning, Evening and Sabbath Liturgy

THE HYMNS OF THE NAZARETHA

Composed by Isaiah and Galilee Shembe

Translation and Explanation

By Bongani Mthethwa

With assistance from
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Introduced and Edited

By Carol Muller

The Beginning of the Morning Prayer
(Isaiah Shembe)

May the day be good for the Holy Ones.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE.
May there be abundance for the leader of this service. Amen.

1.

As the dignified congregation who belongs to the Creator of heaven and earth, we are now worshipping him, he who is to be worshipped daily. Amen.

2. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

God almighty
Father of all those who worship him
Bless our awakening on this day
And keep us in your mercy. Amen

3.

Jehovah is my shepherd, I shall not want, I who am his creation. He watches over me at night and during the day. He allows my lips to mention his name.

4.

He did not recall my momentary transgressions when I was still in my mother's womb. He still does not recall them, even now, because of his kindness and his namesake. He restores my soul to good pastures. He guides me to paths of righteousness, because of his kindness and his namesake.

5.

Even though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I shall not fear evil; because you, Jehovah, are within me. Your rod and your staff are a shield for protecting me; I rejoice in them.

6.

You provide a table for me in the presence of my enemies. You have anointed my head with oil, my cups are overflowing.

7.

Indeed, because of your mercy, goodness and kindness which come from you, God, will follow me all the days of my life. With your permission and in your mercy, I will dwell in your house, Lord Jehovah, until the end of my days.

8. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE:
God almighty
Father of all those who worship him
Bless our awakening this day
And keep us in your mercy. Amen.

9.

Remember then, that today you have made an agreement with Jehovah, your God, to dwell in the house of Jehovah, until the end of your days.

10.

Do not omit to worship Jehovah your God on this day, on which he has awakened you. Worship him with all your heart and with all your soul, both of which belong to Jehovah. Worship him in love. Even though you are just walking on a path, worship him, because it is he who sustains you, even while you walk; even if you are just relaxing in your own home during the day worship him.

11.

Even if you are doing your own work, worship him, because it is he who imparts diligence to your spirit. Even if you ask your son or daughter to do something for you, do it in the name of Jehovah; and love your son whom Jehovah gave to you even in pain and suffering.

12. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE
God almighty
Father of all those who worship him
Bless our awakening this day
And keep us in your mercy. Amen

13.

Teach your daughter well how to worship Jehovah, your God. Lest you bear the consequences of not teaching her well.

14.

The pillars of your house must worship Jehovah; and the doors of your house must worship Jehovah.

15.

Most dignified and respectful congregation of the Creator of heaven and earth, may the Creator agree to bless our kneeling and our humility. Amen.

16.

Lord God, Lord of mercy and promise, we thank you indeed, for keeping us last night.

17. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

God almighty
Father of all those who worship him
Bless our awakening this day
And keep us in your mercy. Amen

18.

We thank you Lord Jehovah, for waking us up, King of kings. May we wake up in your presence, Lord Jehovah, this morning; and give us minds that are alert.

19.

Give us diligence Lord Jehovah, in those duties we perform in order to sustain our lives. May the sleep of indolence not shroud us. Lord Jehovah, give us a spirit of diligence that we may plough, weed and watch over that which we have cultivated.

20.

Bless also Lord Jehovah, the work of our hands. We entreat you, accept our pleading, not through our word, but may it be through your word, our Lord, our God.

21.

You must never be idle. It is a sin to be lazy. A lazy person is like a dog which survives by begging food from human beings. At the end of this prayer, take your hoe and till, that is how you will live, and refrain from begging food from people.

22. HYMN

Wake us up in your presence Father of Light,
On this day of yours
Give light to our eyes
And to our hearts.

23.

Walk with us on the path
On which we shall travel
And protect us from the fangs
Of those enemies of ours.

24.

Even when there is drought, plough, because you do not know the time when God will bring the rain. Even if it rains, plough, weed and watch; so that what you have cultivated may not be spoiled. Hopefully you understand: never despise these words.

25.

You should be ashamed of begging food from people, when God has given you hands with which to work, and not to beg. Now, you go around begging with those hands! Why don't you work with those hands!

26.

All the lazy people will be thrown out. Their blood shall be demanded from their hand, it shall not be demanded from the hand of God; because they cast shame on God through their laziness. God has given them hands with which to work. They do not work, they keep their hands for begging for food, they cast shame on God.

27. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

God almighty
Father of all those who worship him
Bless our awakening this day
And keep us in your mercy. Amen

28.

Give us hearts that are willing to observe your laws, on this day on which you have awakened us from sleep. Without you we had no power to waken ourselves [from that sleep].

29.

If you are a priest you must teach yourself to be industrious, so that people can copy your example: God said people must work.

30.

If you the priest are the leader of laziness amongst the people, are you not going to be a burden upon them! As for you, what will you live on? What a great shame it would be if you were to go begging food from the people?

31.

If you then are of the generation of Adam and Eve, to whom it was said in the Garden of Eden, "Plough and watch, you insult yourself by not wanting to work, and are seen to take on the form of a dog."

32. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

God almighty
Father of all those who worship him
Bless our awakening this day
And keep us in your mercy. Amen

33.

For it was said that a human being shall eat of the product of the sweat of his hands, thus said the God of Adam.

34.

God said emphatically that a human being shall eat only after sweating. Do you oppose these words? Does God rejoice over you when he sees you eating food you have not laboured for by the sweat of your brow.

35.

You like to eat food that you have not sweated for. You blame those who deny you, when it is rather your own fault.

36.

Do the eyes of God rejoice in you? If you eat food that you have not sweated for, you have stolen that food.

37. HYMN

To whose poison you handed us over
Because of our sins.
Remove their poison
Through that name of yours.

38. HYMN

Bless Lord, our Father
The work of our hands
That we will have neither need nor want
We who are your people.

39.

God does not rejoice if he sees you eating food for which you have not performed anything, even the smallest amount of work. Even you, lazy girl, you frequently make a nuisance of yourself by taking the belongings of other girls. Why have you taken on such bad character? God sees you in sorrow and your face haggard from hunger.

40.

God is going to say, what is causing you to starve, because you have hands with which the God of Adam said you should plough, and watch. Rest on the seventh day. Work for all six days without missing a single day; do not miss even one of them.

41. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

God almighty
Father of all those who worship him
Bless our awakening this day
And keep us in your mercy. Amen

42.

If you miss out one of the six days on which God said you should work, how will you retrieve it? What sort of explanation will you provide for not having worked? For these are the ten commandments which God said you must not break. Fear Jehovah, and observe his laws. Amen.

43. HYMN

May we not forget on this day
To worship you.
At specific moments and at all times
May we worship you.

HYMN OF THE MORNING PRAYER

1. Wake us up in your presence, Father of Light
On this day of yours.
Give light to our eyes
And to our hearts.

2. Walk with us on the path
On which we shall travel,
And protect us from the fangs
Of our enemies.

3. To whose poison you handed us over
Because of our sins.
Remove their poison
In your name.

4. Bless Lord, our Father,
The work of our hands
That we shall neither need nor want,

We who are your people.

5. May we not forget on this day
To worship you.
At specific moments and at all times
May we worship you.

The Beginning of the Evening Prayer

May the evening be good for the Holy Ones.

CONGREGATION RESPONSE
May there be abundance for the leader of this service. Amen.

1.

Dignified and respectful congregation of the Creator of heaven and earth, we are now worshipping him who is to be worshipped everyday.

2. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

God almighty
Father to all those who worship him
Sleep with us today
Keep us in your mercy. Amen.

3.

Jehovah is my shepherd, I shall not want, I who am his creation. Even on this day he nurtured me and protected me from all the dangers which could have come upon me. I am eternally grateful to him.

4.

In his mercy, he allows my lips to mention his name. I shall be eternally grateful to him. In his mercy he did not recall my momentary transgressions. I shall be eternally grateful to him.

5.

In his mercy, he brings back my soul from its straying. I shall be eternally grateful to him. He guides me to the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake.

6.

Even tonight, I believe that in his mercy he will bring my soul back from its straying. I shall be eternally grateful to him.

7.

Even though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I shall not fear evil; because Jehovah's shield will protect me, in his mercy.

8. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

God almighty
Father of all those who worship him

Bless our awakening this day
And keep us in your mercy. Amen

9.

Your rod and staff cause me to be happy. You lay a table for me in the presence of my enemies.

10.

You have anointed my head with oil, my cup overflows. Indeed, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, because of your mercy, Lord Jehovah. I shall be eternally grateful to him.

11.

With your permission and by your mercy, I will dwell in your house Lord Jehovah, until the end of my days.

12.

Remember, today, that you have made an agreement with Jehovah, your God, to stay in his house for the rest of your days.

13.

Never miss a day to worship Jehovah your God*. When you wake up, worship him, and when you go to bed, worship him.

14. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

God Almighty
Father of us all those who worship him
Bless our awakening this day
And keep us in your mercy. Amen.

15.

Because it is Jehovah who gives you rest, you cannot sleep unless he has granted it to you. You would remain awake for the whole night; praise him when you go to bed, oh sons and daughters of the people.

16.

For all the days of your life, when you go to sleep, you must worship Jehovah you God*. On the days when you are suffering, call on him. He will listen. He will come to your rescue if at all times you open your heart to the spoor of the word he has pronounced.

17.

Worship Jehovah your God who kept you safe in your mother's womb. Even on the day of delivery, Jehovah did not forsake you.

18. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

God Almighty
Father of us all those who worship him
Bless our awakening this day
And keep us in your mercy. Amen.

19.

Beautiful and dignified congregation of the Creator of heaven and earth, may the Creator agree to bless our kneeling and our humility. Amen.

20.

Worship him with all your heart and with all your soul. Be our sleeping mat and our pillow tonight. Cover us with your grace tonight.

21. HYMN

Be with us tonight as we sleep
On this particular night
Keep us in your mercy
From all the dangers of this night.

22. HYMN

Be a sleeping mat and a pillow
On this particular night
Cover us with your mercy
On this particular night.

23.

There are many dreams which are diseases*, and which do not come from you, oh Lord, God our Lord. For the many people for whom you are not a shield of protection, those dreams will descend upon them.

24.

When slept in our mothers' wombs, you kept us safe King of Kings; and so on this night we hold onto the hope that you will protect us. Indeed Lord, do not forget us. Keep us safe throughout the whole night.

25.

You must worship Jehovah, you God*, you must love him with all your heart and with all your soul. In the middle of the night, you must worship Jehovah your God, with all your heart and your all your soul.

26. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

God almighty
Father of all those who worship him
Bless our awakening this day
And keep us in your mercy.

27. HYMN

At the moment of my awakening
On this particular night
I will get up and worship you
You God, our God.

28. HYMN

Keep us, in your mercy
From the dangers of this night
Protect us, in your mercy
From the dangers of this night.

29.

Worship Jehovah your God, through actions which bear the fruits of the goodness of your heart, and through a love for him that comes from your heart and your soul.

30.

Even if you wake up in the middle of the night, worship Jehovah your God, worship him with care, be fervent about his word, and be in fear of Jehovah your God.

31.

While you pray, open your heart. Do not only pray with your mouth, not knowing what you are saying, and not knowing who you are addressing. Pray in fear of your God. – Isaiah 58:9.

32.

Jehovah reveals himself to those who pray in fear of him; without polluting their beds they sleep; with full understanding that they pray on those beds. They must also take care of their sleeping mats.

33. HYMN
At the moment of my awakening
On this particular night
I will get up and worship you
You God, our God.

34. HYMN
The time of the first night watch*
May it not pass me by
As for me, I will wake up and worship you
You God, our God.

35.
Because Jehovah visits his people as they sleep, you must take care of the house in which you sleep, so that Jehovah will not be discouraged about visiting you in your dream.

36.
Keep us from the dangers of this night King of Kings. Be our sleeping mat and pillow, and cover us with peaceful sleep. Lord Father we pray to you, Lord Jehovah, accept our prayers. Amen.

HYMN OF THE EVENING PRAYER.

1. Be with us tonight as we sleep
On this particular night
Keep us in your mercy
From all the dangers of this night.

2. Be a sleeping mat and a pillow
On this particular night
Cover us with your mercy
On this particular night.

3. At the moment of my awakening
On this particular night
I will get up and worship you
You God, our God.

4. Keep us, in your mercy
From the dangers of this night
Protect us, in your mercy
From the dangers of this night.

5. At the moment of my awakening

On this particular night
I will get up and worship you
You God, our God.

6. The time of the first night watch,
May it not pass me by.
As for me, I will wake up and worship you,
You God, our God.

PRAYER OF THE SABBATH

MAY THE SABBATH DAY BE GOOD FOR THE HOLY ONES

May there be blessings in abundance for the leader of this service. Amen. They hymnal prologue of the Sabbath prayer.

The hymn for the commemoration of the generations, the commemoration of mourning and the commemoration of God.

1. Worship Jehovah, Nazaretha, [16]
   From generation to generation,
   Because his mercy
   Endures forever.[17]

2. He is worthy to be praised by the Nazaretha
   From generation to generation,
   Because his mercy
   Endures forever.

3. He made us reign over the homesteads
   Of our enemies,
   Because his mercy
   Endures forever.

4. He scattered them with the arm
   That is omnipotent,
   Because his mercy
   Endures forever.

5. He led us in the face
   Of our enemies,

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[16] Mthethwa translates this as Nazarethism, commenting again in 1989, that "Shembe called his type of Christianity "ubuNazaretha: i.e nazarethism, obviously connecting with Christ's birthplace, the town of Nazareth. Tshabalala refers to it as" ". I have simply used Nazaretha in all translation because it suggests something peculiar to the followers of Shembe while still retaining the historical links Shembe made with Christianity. See also Sundkler's discussion (1961 [1948]:334-335) the relationship between Moses (Exodus), Nazir (Numbers 6) and the Messiah (Gospels) in South African religious groups.

[17] This couplet, in the original *Ngokuba Umusa Wakhe/uhlezi phakade* (and translates as "for your mercy endures forever" links textually with similar lines in the Old Testament Psalms, and mission hymnody, such as the structure of *Mayith 'ingqondo yethu* (Sing Together, 1992:D1). Both are quatrains with exactly the same text in the last two lines of each stanza.

Because his mercy
Endures forever.

6. We ruled over the hills
And the surrounding mountains,
Because his mercy
Endures forever.

7. We reigned over their homesteads,
Those that were scattered,
Because his mercy
Endures forever.

8. They looked at us in disappointment,
Stunned, they could say nothing,
Because his mercy
Endures forever.[18]

9. Praise him with drums
And with [sacred] dance,
Because his mercy
Endures forever.

10. Praise him with drums
That are powerful,
Because his mercy
Endures forever.

THE BEGINNING OF THE SABBATH PRAYER

Great congregation of the Creator of heaven and earth, we have now entered into the rite of paying respect to the great day that was honoured by our father, the Creator of heaven and earth, when he had finished creating the heaven the earth and all things. Praise him who is worthy to be praised. Genesis 2:1-3 and Deuteronomy 5:12.

2.
Let it be so!
May it be glorious
Here on earth and in the land above.
Glorify Jehovah. Amen.

[18] See Muller (1995:383) for commentary on this stanza.

3.

Fear Jehovah, oh generations upon generations; and observe his laws which he, Jehovah, wrote through his servant Moses, so that your worship may be acceptable to the Lord of hosts. Malachi 4:4.

4.

Because if you do not worship him through his laws he will not accept your prayers. He can never pour his blessings down upon you if you do not obey his laws and observe them.

5.

I beg you generations, in the name of Jehovah the Lord, observe Jehovah's laws.

6.

Jehovah is my shepherd,[19] I shall not want, I who am his creation. He watches over me night and day. He allows my lips to utter his name.

7.

He restores my soul from its wandering and he guides me to the paths of righteousness because of his mercy.

8.

Even though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I shall not fear evil because Jehovah's shield will protect me, because of his mercy.

9.

It is he who lays a tray[20] of his kindness before me; he causes me to rejoice in the presence of my enemies; he anoints my head with oil and my cup overflows.

10.

Indeed, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of Jehovah, until the end of my days.

11.

Remember that today you made an agreement with Jehovah your God, that you will stay in Jehovah's house until the end of your days. Deuteronomy 23:23.

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[19] Cf. Psalm 23

[20] The metaphorical tray ties in with the overflowing cup.

12.

Do not omit to worship Jehovah, your God, on this day on which he has wakened you from that Sleep in which you had not knowledge as to whether you would waken again.

13.

Worship him with all your heart and with all your soul, both of which belong to Jehovah. Deuteronomy 30:2 and 28:4-7.

14.

Worship him with love, even if you travel on the path, worship, because as you walk he is like your walking stick, even if you are only relaxing in your own home, worship him. Deuteronomy 11:18-19.

15

(Congregation kneels)

Beautiful, dignified and respectful congregation of the Creator of heaven and earth, may the Creator agree to bless our kneeling and our humility. Amen.

16.

In his mercy, Jehovah retrieved us from our straying so that we could resume our places as his children. After all, we are his children.

17.

There is no father that created us, and no mother who breast-fed us, it is Jehovah alone.

18.

He retrieved us from our straying from his law, through these words of the Sabbath. Exodus 20:7-8; Deuteronomy 5:1; Luke 23:54.

19.

Today is the Sabbath for all you people who fear Jehovah. You and your children must heed the law of the Sabbath because it is a great joy to God when the Sabbath is observed. As for me, I beg you, Nazaretha, in the name of the Lord Jehovah, do not harden your hearts, children of Senzangakhona.

20.

I am pleading with you, in the name of the Lord Jehovah, observe Jehovah's Sabbath, it is Jehovah's Holy ceremony.

21.

Do not behave like your fathers the Dinganas and Senzangakhonas, our father who hardened their hearts. Jehovah eventually punished them in this manner, now today we bear their sins. So then observe Jehovah's Sabbath.

22.

Obey Jehovah's word. In obeying Jehovah's word, it is good to listen and act; do not simply listen without acting, so then observe Jehovah's Sabbath.

23. Hymn
Give thanks to Jehovah
Because he is righteous,
Because his mercy
Endures forever.

24. Hymn
He who saved the Nazaretha
From their enemies,
Because his mercy
Endures forever.

25. Lesson

Don't labour on this day. If you do work on this day, you insult the Sabbath of Jehovah. This is the law that says you will work for six days only.

Nazaretha Hymn 200.

26.

The seventh day is the day of rest for you and those of your household. It is the ceremony of Jehovah the Holy One. It is only for praising him, Jehovah.

27.

God is greatly pleased with those who observe the seventh day. God loves those who observe the Sabbath. Observe it then, together with those of your household.

28.

When they are gathered and observing the Sabbath, he does not look at them with his eyes, but looks at them as the bride respects her bridegroom.

29.

But he reserves his ear to receive joy in the singing of those who fear him; who correctly observe the Sabbath, those who ascertain which day it is that was chosen by God that should be the true Sabbath. – John 5:39.

30. Hymn
Praise and thanks

Are due to him,
Because his mercy
Endures forever.

31.

He protected them by means of
Powerful kings,
Because his mercy
Endures forever.

32.

He liberated
Because of his love for us,
Because his mercy
Endures forever.

33.

Let us know the ways
Of our Liberator,
Because his mercy
Endures forever.

34. Lesson

May God give to you, Man who is the head of your household, the heart to teach your son to respect his father and to respect his mother, so that you will not be held accountable for his disrespect towards his parents. The book for the blessing of children-Ezekiel 3:18

35.

May God give to you, Woman, who is the of your household, the heart to teach your son to respect his father.

36.

Because the word says the son who does not respect his father must be killed, if you Woman have not taught your son, your hand will be held accountable for the sin of disrespecting his father. Deuteronomy 21:18-21.

37.

Man, if you have not taught your son to respect you, the parent, as well as his mother, the blood of the sins of disrespect towards his parents will be on your hands.

38.

May God give you, my son, the heart to obey the teachings of your father, the teachings that say "Thou shalt not tempt they neighbour away from what belongs to him."

39.

This says that you must not wish for a girl that is already wedded to somebody else; do not even look at her. This is the worst sin. Deuteronomy 22:23-24.

40.

Listen carefully, my son, respecting your father and mother increases the days of your life on earth.

41.

That is why there is no old man in your house and you die young, because you do not observe the law that says respect your father and mother.

42.

They might even say we have given birth to nothing. That is the curse if your father and our mother have reason to blame you.

43.

Man respect God throughout the days of your life. Be satisfied with your love for your wife. Do not tempt the heart of your neighbour in his house.

44.

Do not wish ill on your neighbour in his house. Do not think of killing another person.

45.

It is sinful for you as a believer to hold medicine in your hands; you will die, will die.

46.

Teach your daughter not to spoil herself. As for you, daughter, obey the teachings of your father and mother that say respect your father and mother.

47.

If you listen will to the teachings of your parents, your days of living under the sun will be increased. You will be blessed in your marriage and the offspring of your marriage will be blessed.

48.

Listen well, then you of the house of Senzangakhona, and do not blunt your ears not harden your hearts.

49.

Listen well to the serving of the word of Jehovah, and do not carry a load on the Sabbath of Jehovah.

50.

Even if you come from all of the countries under the heavens bringing gifts or offerings with joy to Jehovah at the house of Ekuphakameni, Jehovah will not accept them, if you do not observe the day of the Sabbath.

51.

Praise be to the one who created heaven and earth. Amen. Let it be so.

52.

May he remember the house of Senzangakhoma and Dingane which is dispersed, let him gather it from its dispersion. Amen.

53.

May he do so, he who created heaven and earth long ago. Amen.

54.

Our Lord God, receive our prayers; not because we say so, but because you say so, let it be so. Amen.

Hymn

1. They wandered in the wilderness,
   And in the mountains,
   Because his mercy
   Endures forever.

2. He put them on the palm
   Of his hand,
   Because his mercy
   Endures forever.

3. He led them to the hill
   Of Nhlangakazi,
   Because his mercy
   Endures forever.

4. He defeated the schemes
   Of their conspirators,
   Because his mercy
   Endures forever

5. He turned their slavery into
   A kingdom,
   Because his mercy

Endures forever.

6. Praise Jehovah, Nazaretha,
Together with your descendants,
Because his mercy
Endures forever.

7. Congregation of the Lord let us kneel and pray. Amen.

Appendix 5. Hymns Sung During Sabbath Services

Hymn 32[33]

1. I am no like you Father.
   I shall try my best
   To be like you
   At all times.

2. I will be joyful and I am
   Satisfied
   In my worship of you.
   I am assembled with the Holy
   Ones
   Who meditate at all times.

3. I am not like you Father
   Of ours;
   I shall, nevertheless, try
   through you
   To light my own lamp.

4. I am not like you Father.
   Craving has made me sin,
   Clothe me with the robes of
   David
   That will bring an end to my
   guilt.

Hymn 39

1. Give thanks to Jehovah,
   Oh my soul, while you have the
   chance,
   [For] that time will soon come
   [When] it will no longer be
   possible
   To even go down on your knees
   To worship him.

2. Give thanks to Jehovah,
   Oh my soul, while you have the
   chance,
   [For] that time will come near
   [When] it will no longer be
   possible
   To even go to the servant
   [Shembe],
   To see him.

3. Give thanks to Jehovah,
   Oh my soul, while you have the
   chance,
   [For] that time will come near
   [When] it will no longer be
   possible
   To even raise your hand
   To cover yourself.

Hymn 45[41]

1. I cried out, night and day,
   Why did you not hear me?
   Nations sleep so that the Zulus
   Can be heard
   Before the Saviour.[42]

2. I was prevented by all the
   nations
   Who are beneath the
   heavens.

Hymn 54

1. Tell us about your word,
   Let us all hear it
   And let it penetrate our hearts
   And delight us.

2. Tell me about your word,
   Let me hear it,
   It has healed the multitudes
   Who were [as good as] dead.

Nations sleep so that the Zulus
can be heard
Before the Saviour.

3. Oh, maiden of Nazaretha,[43]
You wail like a waterfall
For the disgrace that has come
upon you
In your own country.
Nations sleep so that the Zulus
can be heard
Before the Saviour.

4. Oh, young man of Nazaretha
You too, must wail like a
waterfall
For the disgrace that has come
upon you,
You, warrior of Shaka
Nations sleep so that the Zulus
Can be heard
Before the Saviour.

Hymn 64

1. The old and the young
May they be visited by you;
Remember, Lord,
Their hearts.

2. Remember, Lord,
Those who are sickly,
Stretch out your hand
So that they are saved from
death.

3. Remember those, Lord,
Who are on the brink of death,
Welcome with joy
Their souls.

3. Let us also accept it,
That word of yours,
And accomplish what it
commands
So that we observe [it] until the
end.

Hymn 69[59]

1. The word of the Lord
Has come upon us.
Let us welcome it
Wholeheartedly.

2. Give thanks, oh friends,
For those blessings
That Jehovah, our Lord,
Has brought to us.

3. What do you say, people
About these blessings,
That we possess
Together with our children?

4. Give thanks, oh friends,
For those blessings,
That Jehovah our Lord
Has brought to us.

Hymn 89[77]

1. Stay with us, our Lord
This day has passed.
We ask to be helped,
We always look up to you.

2. We have not yet arrived
In the land of happiness.
There the angels are standing,
There the sun never sets.

4. Oh, Father of the orphaned, We are in your presence, Remember us and wipe away Those tears. 5. Remember them, oh Lord, The widows of our people. Keep and care for them And their orphans.	3. We are still hidden From that land of happiness, Where light does not come From the sun of the universe 4. Glory be to you On the earth and in heaven, In all your congregations, To you, God the Father.
Hymn 74[62] 1. What is preached to us At Ekuphakameni, Has healed the multitudes Do come everybody and be healed. 2. Those who come in disappointment Leave in jubilation, Listen, all nations Come and be healed. 3. The contender of the dawn,[63] Of the family of Judah, Has healed the multitudes Come everybody and be healed. 4. Tell all the nations Who are beneath the heavens, To come and hear the news Of Ekuphakameni.	Hymn 98 1. It is the Sabbath today, Lord, May you rejoice in us; On this, your day, That you chose for us. 2. It is the Sabbath today, Lord, Call forth your sheep So that they will follow you, And they will hear your voice. 3. When two or three people are Gathered together in my name, I will be with them And worship with them (Matth 18:20) 4. It is the Sabbath today Lord We are in your presence; May it be a sweet scent, Our worship of you. 5. Creator, call forth your sheep, By their names; They will follow you They will hear your voice.
Hymn 94 1. We heard about him The one who is acclaimed, He has arrived at Ekuphakameni.	Hymn 107 1. Why are you staying with Sizani? Why are you staying with Sizani? You alone will be sorry, our relative, If you do not part from Sizani.

2. We heard about him also, The wise people told us, They said, "He has arrived at Ekuphakameni." 3. They have seen His star, They have seen it at Ekuphakameni Hymn 104 1. Lord God, For whom do you forsake me? Whom will the nations ridicule When I am rejected?[94] 2. You Shepherd, who is the hope, I put my trust in you; It is your hand alone [I am] never without you.	2. Sizani's is the slippery path, Nothing comes back from Sizani, You alone will be sorry, our relative, If you do not part from Sizani. 3. There is only despair on that path, Nothing comes back from Sizani, Its reward is tears For those who walk on it. 4. For those who walk that path The tears do not cease, From their eyes. Ignore what you see, our relative, Leave the path of Sizani.
3. You, Holy Leader, Guide me also, Into greener pastures That my soul may be saved. 4. Nourisher of the orphaned Whose orphan am I? My soul is hungry, Let if be fed by you. 5. Feed me with your milk, Me, your child. I have no ability to distinguish Bad from good.	5. Why are you staying with Sizani? Why are you staying with Sizani? An instant is but a moment, You have much to lose. Hymn 127[113] 1. Hasten the Sabbath, Lord of the heavens and the earth, So that all the nations may be saved That are beneath the sky. 2. Hasten the Sabbath, Lord of the heavens and the earth So that we may fulfill your word, All the nations will be saved.
Hymn 110 1. The heaven and the clouds Worship you, The sun and the moon Worship you.	3. They are gathered here, All those nations, They want the truth of your word, They observe the Sabbath.

2. The stars of heaven
Worship you,
They fall on their knees
They worship you.

3. They say "You are Holy".
You, Eternal God,
The mountains and the hills
Worship you.

4. The fountains of water
Worship you,
Rejoice, you hartebeest,[98]
You who are thirsty.

4. Hasten the Sabbath,
Lord of the heavens and the earth,
Even two or three people
They want the Sabbath.

Hymn 148

1. When we used to wander, you halted us.
We left them drinking,
We followed the sweet scented on.
Give thanks to Jehovah.

2. Even today, they are still captured, Those who are set apart fordarkness,
They are free, those who are called.
Give thanks to Jehovah.

3. We need [ways] to thank him,
We who were called and responded,
So we thank him, he who is
Worthy of praise.
Give thanks to Jehovah

4. They have been called from the graves,
They have left, we saw them,
They entered the Holy City.
Give thanks to Jehovah.

Hymn 153[133]

Prologue: This hymn came to the servant of suffering, Shembe, on June 26, 1928 at Phuzawenele.

1. Here is the word of invitation,
It invites all people.
It does not discriminate against a single person,
It invites all people.

2. The Brown, and the White
It invites them likewise;
It does not discriminate against a single person,
It invites all people.

3. You blind and you crippled people,
Respond to the call.
This invitation is from heaven,
All nations are invited.
It does not discriminate against a single person,
It invites all people.

5. Our bail has been paid, we believe
Our forefathers died in ancient times,
Their graves opened.
Give thanks to Jehovah

Hymn 164[144]

1. The service of that place
Is peace and kindness.
We enter by means of others,
And we are welcomed with kindness.

2. You, home of peace,
Rejoice in us,
We are greeted by the Holy Ones,
We greet you, our friends.

Hymn 160[139]

1. The voice of the cowards says
They are afraid of Kuphakameni
Where are you going?
This thing will disappear by Tomorrow.
Chorus
You, Kuphakama, are like this,
You provide light for all the nations.

2. The cowards laugh cynically.
They say, "Ha ha ha, this thing will soon disappear,
By tomorrow it will disappear, it will be no more,
It will all disappear, it will be no more."
Chorus

3. Persevere, you heroes,
Do not be intimidated by the Cowards.
They are afraid of Ekuphakameni.
They say "He, he, he, this thing will disappear.
Chorus

4. Stand tall, you Kuphakama,

3.Gates of Kuphakama,
Rise up, that we may enter,
We desire you,
Home of peaced.

4. The sun and the moon
Do not shine there,
It is only the Eternal One
Who is the sun at that place.

5. The light of the sun
Does not compare
With our home,
To which we are destined.

Hymn 213[186]

Prologue: This hymn was composed by the servant of suffering Shembe, when he met a boy who was carrying a baby monkey and was on his way to sell it. The servant of the Lord gave the boy 5 shillings, and asked the boy to return the monkey to the forest where he had caught it.

1. "Shembe, son of Mayekisa,
Have mercy on me."
That is what the baby monkey said

So that all nations will be subdued,
Today we hear them say
"Come to Ekuphakameni."
Chorus

5. You, village built on the hilltop,
You cannot be obscured!
You provide light for all nations
That are beneath the sun.
Chorus

As he was approaching him.

2. He said, "Liberator of prisoners
Which people will you set free?
I left my father and my mother
I do not know where I am
going."

3. He then called the child
And said, "Where are you taking
this monkey?"
He replied, saying,
"I have been sent."

Hymn 208[181]

1. Rejoice, rejoice,
It has arrived, this of the
Nazaretha,
Rejoice, rejoice
The nations shall be saved,
Those who were scattered all
over,
Wandering
In the wildernesses
For the sake of your word.

2. Rejoice, rejoice,
It has arrived, this of the
Nazaretha,
Rejoice, rejoice,
The nations shall be saved.
The darkness has now receded,
Rejoice and be glad,
All you nations.

3. Many nations
Under the sky,
We see them scattered,
Singing and despondent.

4. And he asked him, saying,
"How much do you want?"
The child replied and said,
"I want 5 shillings."

5. He gave him 5 shillings and said,
"Take it back."
And he returned that monkey
To the place from which he had
taken it.

6. Wake up, it is now daybreak,
When will you wake up?
You have been left behind by the
monkeys
In recognising the Lord.

4.	Spread yourself, spread yourself, Spread yourself, [faith] of the Nazaretha. Spread yourself, spread yourself The nations are thirsty, They want to drink from you That their faith may overflow Through your word.	

Appendix 6. Chronology of Zulu Bible Translations

Bible Translations for Zulu Speakers in Southern Africa
American Bible Society Update: 5, March , 2004

Zulu [Ethn[13]]; Zunda [Ethn[13var]]; Zoeloe [1970[bk]].

Speakers:	8,778,000 in South Africa (1995 THe Economist); 37,480 in Malawi (1966 census); 248,000 in Lesotho (1993; 9,140,000 total (Ethn[13]).
Location:	South Africa: Zululand and northern Natal. Also in Lesotho, Malawi, and Swaziland.
Kinship:	Niger-Congo / Atlantic-Congo / Volta-Congo / Benue-Congo / Bantoid / Southern / Narrow Bantu / Central / S / Nguni (S.40).

1848 *Matthew* ABCFM[1], Pietermaritzburg
1850 +*Psalms* 1854 +*Romans* ABCFM, Port Natal
1856 *Mark* ABCFM, Pietermaritzburg
1859 *Acts* ABCFM, Emsunduzi
1863 +*Genesis* ABS, New York
1865 +*New Testament* ABCFM, Natal
1868 +*Ezra* 1869 +*1-2 Kings* +*Daniel* ABCFM, Esidumbini
1869 +*Hosea-Malachi* ABCFM, Durban
1872 *New Testament* (revised) ABCFM, Natal
1873 +*Proverbs* +*Ezekiel* ABS, New York
1878 +*New Testament* (corrected) ABCFM, Natal
1881 +*Song of Songs* Printed privately, Durban
1882 +*Psalms* +*Proverbs* (corrected) 1883 +*Bible* ABS, New York
1890 +*New Testament* (revised) [Repr. +1892] 1893 +*Bible* (revised) [Repr. +1903, +1947, +1981, +1982] ABS, New York
Translated, over the years, by missionaries of the ABCFM, including Newton Adams, George Champion, J.C. Bryant, Lewis Grout, C.W. Posselt (Berlin MS), and Jakob L. Döhne. The 1883 *Bible* was revised and corrected by Andrew Abraham and finally edited for publication by S.C.

Pixley. The 1890 *NT* and the 1890 *Bible* were revised by David Rood (ABCFM).

1866 *Gospels* 1867 *Acts, Romans* Printed privately, Pietermaritzburg
An independent translation prepared by Jakob L. Döhne (ABCFM).

187? +*New Testament* [Repr. 1897] 1871 +*1-2 Samuel* Davis, Maritzburg
1882 *Exodus* Bishopstowe
1902 +*Genesis* Vause and Slatter, Pietermaritzburg
Translated by J.W. Colenso, Bishop of Natal.

1871 +*Psalms* 1872 *Isaiah-Micah* Printed privately, Springvale
1875 *Genesis-Joshua* St. John's MP, Pondoland
1877 +*Gospels* Kaffraria Church MP, Highflats
Translated by Henry Callaway and W.O. Newman (SPG^2), assisted by Umpengula Mbanda.

1890 *Matthew* Catholic MP, Mariannhill
Translated by an anonymous RC missionary.

1917 +*New Testament* 1924 +*Bible* ABS, New York
A new revision of the 1893 text, prepared by James Dexter Taylor (ABCFM).

1922 *New Testament* [Repr. +1924] Hermannsburg Mission, Moorleigh
Translated by missionaries of the Hermannsburg Evangelical Lutheran Mission.

1933-1941 +*Psalms* 1945-1950 +*John* 1951 +*Ruth* Natal
Translated by F. Suter and published serially in "Native Teacher's Journal".

1948 *John* (tentative) 1950 +*Mark* +*John* 1951 +*Luke* BFBS, Cape Town
1956 +*New Testament* (revised orthography) 1959 +*Bible* [Repr. +*NT* 1968, 1984] BFBS, London
1997 +*Bible* (new orthography) BS of South Africa, Roggebaai
Revised by a committee under the direction of T.M. Leisegang and, later, Otto Sarndal. It included Johannes Astrup, Gustaf Krauss, Heinrich Filter, S. Dahle, M.J. Mpanza, W. Weber, M.C. Haldorsen, and others.

1950 *Matthew* [Repr. 1961, 1970] Catholic MP, Mariannhill
Translated by an anonymous RC missionary.

1956 +*New Testament* [Repr. 1966] 1973 *Psalms* Catholic MP, Mariannhill
Translated by Raphael Studerus (RC).

1968 +*Romans* Word of Life, Durban
1973 +*New Testament* Word of Life, Overport
A paraphrase version, based on the English 1967 Living version.

1979 +*Mark, Acts, Ephesians, Psalms* 1986 +*New Testament, Psalms* (with revised *Ps*) [Repr. +1992] BS of South Africa, Cape Town
Translated by an interconfessional committee, including Bethuel Ndelu (Luth.), Ernest Nkize, D.T. Maseko (Ang.), and others, under the supervision of Nils Jöelson (Swedish Luth.).

1994 +*New Testament* 2002 +*Bible* WTBTS[2] New York
Translated by the New World Bible Translation Committee and published with study helps.

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[1] The normal text relates to the ultimate question I want answered to solve the research questions. The **bold** face texts are the actual questions I raise with the interviewee. The *italicsed* text relates to the responses from Vimbeni Shembe.

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